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THE

BROTHER OF THE SHADOW

A Mystery of To-day

BY

MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED

AUTHOR OF "AFFINITIES," "NADINE," ETC

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

When Messrs. George Routledge & Sons kindly asked me to write a story for their series of one-volume novels, I had no hesitation in accepting their invitation, although the form was not familiar to me, and I had been accustomed to tell my tales at greater length. I am inclined, however, to believe that there is a new career—if I may use such an expression in such a case—opening for the short story, the one-volume novel, in this country. I have no complaint to make of the three-volume system, or of the circulating library. The latter has helped into existence many a promising and successful book, which, if it had to be bought and sold altogether on its own merits, might have waited a long time a mere promise without success. But there

is room enough and to spare for a literature of short stories, such as France has always had, and I am glad to have a chance of writing my name in it.

The suggestion to write what I may call a mystical story came from the publishers also. I willingly accepted the idea, because it is one that floats upon the wave of thought which is just now swelling in so strangely on modern English Society.

R. M. PRAED

THE

BROTHER OF THE SHADOW.

I.

Letter from Colonel Julian Vascher to Dr. Lemuel Lloyd.

MILITARY COMPOUND, ALLAHABAD,
January 20th, 1885.

DEAR OLD LEM. LLOYD,

We used to be such capital pals in days gone by—before I went to India and you turned mystic—that I really can't begin an elaborate apology for forcing myself on your notice, etc., etc. I never was much of a hand at letter writing, and have dropped you so completely—more shame to me—that, I daresay, you have forgotten the style of my fist, and before you read any further will be turning to the end of the letter to see who your correspondent can be. Well, I

hope you are satisfied now; and, perhaps, after all, you have asked my Hindoo friend, Ananda, a good many questions about me, and are in a position to skip preliminaries. It is difficult to believe that ten years have passed since we shared the same diggings in Ebury Street. I can't think why I missed you in both of the trips home that I have made. I heard about you however. The first time you were set up as a swell London medico in Harley Street, and were physicking the Prime Minister; and the second you had come a cropper over mesmerism and homœopathy, and had gone off to Asia Minor to doctor the Druses. I felt a great respect for you when I heard that you had struck out a new scientific line. I have always had a lurking belief in magnetism, though I am of the commonplace flesh-and-blood order of mankind, and mystical contemplation, metaphysics, and miracles are a good many pegs above me. That is the sort of thing Ananda goes in for, and he tells me that he has found in you a kindred spirit. I can't say that, personally, I have much sympathy with his ideas, but I have lived long enough in the East to have satisfied myself that the Yogi and Fakir

business is not all humbug. There are more things in heaven and earth——! It was a piece of luck Ananda hitting upon you by chance in Paris. I wanted to give him a letter to you when he made up his mind to go and study European civilization, but as I hadn't heard of your return from the Druses, there wasn't much use in writing it. I hope, however, that you have got to like him for his own sake, apart from my recommendation. He was always a sort of *protégé* of mine, and used to spend a good deal of time in my quarters before he got mixed up with the wise men of Gotham, as I irreverently style the brotherhood of Tibetan adepts who are instructing him in the mysteries of occultism. When I heard from him two or three months ago, he said that you had asked him to stay with you, and gave me your address. He told me that you are making a *specialité* of curing nervous disorders by electricity. That bit of information touched me very closely, as you will see presently. If you and Ananda happen to be together when yon receive this, tell him that I am ashamed of not having answered his letter, but the truth is, that I have been so weighed down

by home anxieties that I have had no heart tc write. And that brings me to the point of my letter to you, to which all this is only a "sadly smiling" prelude. I am going to ask a favour of you; and, as you used to be a real good fellow and an awfully clever chap in your profession, I am certain beforehand that the favour will be granted, and that the whole thing will work just as I have arranged it in my mind.

"This is what I want you to do for me, in the double capacity of doctor and friend. You will have heard from Ananda that I married out here a little time before he left India. My poor wife has fallen into bad health. She suffers from neuralgia of the most violent kind, the pain of which is simply killing her. The doctors here can do nothing except stupefy her during the paroxysms by injecting morphine; and of late the attacks have been so frequent, that she is almost always under the influence of the drug. You know what a terrible effect this must have upon her constitution; and there seems no prospect of any real respite from pain. The men here can't account for her illness, but they all agree that she must be sent at once to another

climate. A friend of mine, who once suffered in the same way and got relief through a mesmerist, has talked me into the conviction that magnetism is the only thing which can cure her. He advises electric baths, and she is very anxious to try the whole system. She has been ordered to stay on the Riviera, as they consider her too delicate to encounter an English spring. I have applied for leave, but my getting off depends on the settlement of these infernal Egyptian complications, and so, I am compelled to send her to Europe with only her maid, who fortunately, however, is a trained nurse. I shall hope to follow her in a month or two. In the meantime imagine my anxiety, for I have no one to whom I can confide her—except, indeed, yourself; and should know no peace if I had to think of her in the hands of possibly an unscrupulous quack. I can't tell why one should associate the idea of mesmerism with charlatanry—but so it is. Since this is your *spécialité*, you can relieve me of a heavy burden. Will you take charge of her, settle her comfortably in or near Nice—they advise a short distance from the sea—and consider her your patient? Spare no expense.

I know you well enough to feel absolutely sure that in placing her under your care I am, humanly speaking, securing for her all that skill can achieve. This will reach you, according to my calculation, a day or two before her arrival at Marseilles. I have taken her passage by the Messageries boat *Orontes*, and post this in advance by the P. and O. to Brindisi. Our minds were only made up yesterday, so that there is no time to make elaborate arrangements, and I must trust Fate to bar accidents. I have instructed my wife to telegraph to you as soon as she lands at Marseilles. Should you fail her through absence or any other cause, I can depend upon the doctor of the *Orontes*, whom I know personally, to establish her at Cannes or Nice, and introduce her to a competent medical man. Wire to me immediately when you get this and set my mind at rest.

Yours ever sincerely,

JULIAN VASCHER.

* * * * *

On the heights above one of the great Riviera watering places, there is a quaint fortress-like

village which dates back to the time of the Saracens, and is called Monte Santo.

Though only two or three miles distant from the city of pleasure, which,—with its white villas stretching downward to the dancing Mediterranean, its palm groves, its Parisian boulevards, its stream of cosmopolitan population, its general air of frivolity—seems to distil the very essence of modern life, Monte Santo has an old-world atmosphere, a weirdness, a solemnity of aspect that is apt to produce a dreamy, almost mystic feeling on an impressionable mind. This effect becomes intensified by the sombreness of the surrounding olive plantations; the deep shadows cast by the hills—in such strange contrast to the dazzling sea; the chill air which creeps up the ravines; the pallid greyness of the rocks; the grotesque outlines of the stone pines which dot the arid slopes; and the cold splendour of the snow-clad Maritime Alps visible through rifts in the encircling chain of nearer mountains.

The outer walls of Monte Santo are of crumbling stone, with windows small and barred, the streets are narrow and rugged, and on the doors and lintels hang strings of green curled orange

peel, used for the manufacture of bergamot, and twisted loaves of brown bread. The crooked, weather-stained campanile is roofed in tiles of three different colours. There is a tiny square *place* where wrinkled crones sit winding hemp, and mumbling in a *patois* of mingled French and Italian, and children in oddly shaped blue cotton blouses, with queer little round faces and bright black eyes, tumble over each other in play.

On the very brow of the hill lies a grassy plateau which commands a magnificent view of the sea to the south, and of the mountains to the north-east. Here is a defaced shrine, lonely, wind beaten, and seldom visited. Here also stands a half-ruined château with red gables, and a curious square tower, the base of which resembles a fortification. The château is hardly visible from below, and is screened from observation on one side by the walls of the old tower, and on the others by rows of cypresses and gnarled olives.

From the tower, a plummet might almost be dropped into the grounds of a large hotel built further down the slope, and as it were, a connecting link with the gay world below. But even

the hotel has its mediæval associations, and the terraced garden, the arbours, the marble steps and balustrades, are not the mushroom growth of financial enterprise. The hotel was originally the winter abode of a family of Italian Princes, and is still called the Villa Vimiera. A circuitous carriage drive winding round the hill leads from the hotel to the old town, but is seldom used, the strand and the boulevards offering greater attractions to the herd of semi-invalids by whom the villa is frequented.

In the beginning of the present year, the Château St. Etiénne, as it was called, was occupied by Dr. Lemuel Lloyd. He was a physician of talent and formerly of note in London.

Dr. Lloyd was in age about forty, and had started some eight years previously in the ordinary groove of medicine, though he had always a leaning towards mysticism, an insatiable craving after scientific discovery, and a vague belief in occult forces. One or two startling cures brought him into prominence, but gradually he acquired a reputation for quackery, and his failure in an important case plunged him into direct conflict with the faculty. By degrees his practice

dwindled. He had, however, independent means, so did not count this a misfortune. He made a specialty of the treatment of disease by magnetism. Clairvoyance gave tantalising glimpses of an unexplored world. He felt himself at the very door of Nature's temple. Oh, for a key! He became a student of Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, Van Helmont, and the Kabalists. Oriental lore fascinated him. Swedenborg partly lifted the veil of spiritual mysteries. He was conscious of strange forces within himself. The desire for occult powers possessed him like a thirst. He practised suppression of his animal impulses. Though a man of strong emotions, and artistic sensuousness, he became almost an ascetic. A slight delicacy of the lungs forced him to seek a warm climate. His peculiar methods and his bent towards solitude, forbade the pursuit of his profession in any of the fashionable resorts. Yet, to prosecute his inquiries magnetic subjects were necessary. He had also a sincere wish to benefit mankind. Monte Santo took his fancy. Here was a retreat easy of access to those who desired his services. He advocated the use of electric baths. A large room in his house was set apart

for the purpose, with apparatus under competent superintendence. A thin stream of patients flowed in during the winter; and proximity to the Château St. Etiénne was considered one of the minor recommendations to the Hôtel Vimiera.

Ananda, the Hindoo of whom Colonel Vascher wrote, took up his abode with Dr. Lloyd in December of '84. He was a young Brahmin of high caste and a student of occultism. He had been educated in the English University of Calcutta, and even in point of western culture was the equal, if not the superior, of Dr. Lloyd. Ananda stated himself to be the pupil of certain adepts of Inner Asia, who even at this distance were able to maintain communication with the young man by occult means, such as psychological telegraphy and the projection of the Astral Double. This was the secret of Dr. Lloyd's interest in the Hindoo. Ananda denied the possession of any abnormal powers, and declared himself to be merely a neophyte in the earliest stage of advancement; but Dr. Lloyd knew that he was sometimes during sleep taken out of his body, and that upon these occasions while keeping his faculties active, he conversed with his

master and received instruction in philosophy and occult science. It was Lloyd's ardent desire that he also might enjoy these advantages, but as his aspirations soared higher he became conscious that the inferior magnetism generated by his former grosser contact with the world, barred him from communion with these lofty beings, and stultified his really spiritual yearnings, while from his imperfect psychic development, it was but rarely that his inner eyes were unclosed; and for the most part the world of the unseen, and its wonders, remained to him a sealed book.

Magnetic experiments had familiarised Dr. Lloyd with some forms of clairvoyance. It seemed to him in his difficulty, that could he but operate upon a sensitive, etherealized temperment with psychic faculties ready to burst into play, the knowledge for which he panted might be his; and, also, his will-power would be strengthened and trained, and his sphere of usefulness widened.

Ananda concurred in this theory, but did not encourage it. He feared the supremacy of Lloyd's earthy propensities, for he was aware of the probability—nay, almost certainty, that only

in the person of a woman could a suitable subject be found. He knew the dangers of mesmeric rapport to one not wholly purified from desire, the subtle intoxication of the senses which it produces, the paralysis of the will on one part, and on the other, its liability to intensify itself in the physical direction. Ananda was an ascetic, single-hearted in devotion to truth, yet young though he was, he had battled against the most dangerous temptation that can assail the occultist.

But to warn was only to stimulate longing. Dr. Lloyd sought in vain among his patients for a clairvoyante of the higher order. He was on the point of leaving Monte Santo in order to pursue his investigations in Paris, when Colonel Vascher's letter arrived and turned the direction of his thoughts.

Dr. Lloyd when he read this letter was seated in his private room at the Château—the room where he received his patients and carried on his professional studies. There was another—an inner sanctum, veiled now by a heavy curtain, but to this he retired only when desirous of withdrawing himself completely from the outside world.

The library, as it was called, which he at this moment occupied, overlooked the gardens of the Hôtel Vimiera. It was built adjoining the square tower, and had an entrance from without, used only by Ananda and himself. It was comparatively spacious and was furnished with a sort of sombre magnificence. The carpets were velvet pile, the cabinets early Florentine. The large writing-table at which he sat, was curiously inlaid, and the bookcases, almost covering one side of the oblong room, were surmounted with choice specimens of antique ware. The other side was hung with tapestry, except where a massive door opened out upon a small balcony ending at the angle of the tower wall. From the balcony a flight of stone steps led to a raised terrace bordered by palms.

In appearance Dr. Lloyd gave the impression of great mental power combined with intense animal vigour. Except for a few perpendicular lines in his lofty forehead, there was nothing to indicate the sedentary life of a student. He held himself erect; his frame was muscular, his complexion sanguine; he had a look of dominance and resolve, and his dark, quickly piercing eyes told

of action rather than contemplation. He had a curious square face, with full decisively cut lips, a short crisp moustache and beard, and a smile the sweetness of which was at once fascinating and provoking, it seemed so much out of harmony with the general characteristics of the countenance.

Dr. Lloyd laid down Colonel Vascher's letter, and for several minutes seemed absorbed in thought. A struggle of some kind was going on. Suddenly, he took up his pen and wrote two telegrams.

The first was to Julian Vascher—a cordial message expressing Dr. Lloyd's willingness to undertake the charge of his friend's wife. The second, addressed to Mrs. Vascher on board the *Orontes*, to the care of the Messageries Maritimes Agency at Marseilles, stated that he awaited her commands either to join her at Marseilles or meet her at Nice, where he would at once arrange for her accommodation.

Touching an electric spring, he summoned his servant, to whom he delivered the telegrams for transmission. Almost immediately after the man had withdrawn, the door opened again and Ananda, the Hindoo, entered.

A direct contrast to his host, Ananda was slight and with a physique almost feminine in its delicacy. A striking, indeed a god-like, head crowned his spare form. The face was oval, the skin a pale olive, the features of the purest type —instinct with sensibility, the eyes full and dark, the irises of wonderful clearness, the pupils as it were slowly gathering in and emitting light, the whole countenance so tender, so spiritualised, and withal so intellectual, that to watch its play was a delight.

Ananda placed himself opposite Dr. Lloyd; and, taking a cigarette from a box upon the table, began to smoke dreamily. Dr. Lloyd followed his example. The two sat thus for a short time without exchanging a word. One cigarette exhausted, Ananda lighted another. Then, the same thought appeared to strike both. They smiled simultaneously. Ananda spoke in his slow melodious voice with its foreign intonation.

"If to sit for hours together doing nothing be a sign of madness, then I am surely very mad; and many Hindoos are so likewise. Your celebrated Durham divorce case occurred to me at the moment. I sit for hours and hours in lazy

meditation. I have been meditating ever since I came back from the Hôtel Vimiera."

"What were you doing there?" asked Dr. Lloyd indifferently.

"I went to see the tennis, and to study the women," replied Ananda.

"Do you like women, Ananda? Surely they bore you."

"There were some singers from Nice at the hotel. After the *déjêuner* they produced Guadaloupe rum, which they said afterwards was the liqueur that everyone drinks in Paris. They would have had me swallow it. They called it Extrait de Café. I was just saved from that by the expression on the face of one of them." Ananda laughed softly. "Oh, this human nature! It is a beautiful study."

"You are daring, Ananda, for a philosopher. I shall hear of you next at Monte Carlo."

"I like the Bohemian life," said Ananda. "I confess it suits me better than the monstrous sham they call Society. What does it matter with whom I come in contact? If there are affinities between us, I shall influence them for good—if not, it is no matter——"

"Go on, Ananda."

"Frankly," continued the Hindoo, "I am bored when a woman talks to me of philosophy; but if she will be herself I am more than interested. Women are better teachers than men, and they surprise one, which is always a pleasure. I know before a man speaks what he will say; but I do not know what a woman thinks, or how she will phrase her thoughts."

"Ananda!" said Dr. Lloyd, "what sort of a woman is Julian Vascher's wife?"

Ananda did not reply for some seconds. He put down his cigarette. His expression changed. His eyes deepened.

"I do not know."

"But you have seen her? They were married before you left India."

"I hear that she is beautiful. I know that her nature is sweet and sensitive as a musical instrument to the touch of the performer. I know no more. She is passive. No hand has swept the strings."

"How? She loves her husband?"

"She loves him—most fondly."

"Is he then unworthy of her?"

"More than worthy of the woman in her," said Ananda with animation. "But the spirit is asleep."

There was silence. A curious expression dawned upon Lemuel Lloyd's face. Ananda smoked on. "Why do you ask?" he said.

Lloyd handed him the letter. Ananda read it. He sighed deeply. "Poor Toni!" he murmured as if involuntarily.

"Toni!" repeated Lloyd, his voice taking an inflection of almost tender interest.

"Her husband so calls her. She is named Antonia."

Again there was silence. Presently Ananda asked, "You will not go to Paris?"

"No."

"You have replied? Vascher's mind will soon be at ease. I met Barnett with the telegrams."

"Ananda!" exclaimed Dr. Lloyd, in an excited manner, "you know of what I am thinking? When I wrote the telegram I felt a presentiment which is now conviction. Why should I go to Paris when Fate is sending me the sensitive for whom I am searching?"

"Why?" repeated Ananda, in a mournful tone. "It would be better, perhaps——"

"No. How difficult to conduct experiments with the professional clairvoyante amid the foul magnetism of Paris! You say she is pure and sweet," he went on with gathering eagerness. "It is unfortunate that she should have led the married life; but she will be apart from her husband. Through her I shall gain access to your master. Fate! This is no mere accident.

"There are no accidents in Life!" returned Ananda, dreamily. "We are but bundles of forces which must work themselves out. But Will can determine whether in doing so, they generate fresh forces of good or of evil." He fixed his luminous eyes upon Lloyd. "You have no misgivings as to the result of your treatment?"

A slow flush mounted to Dr. Lloyd's cheek. "I am not a mere selfish egotist," he cried. "She will be released from suffering. She *shall* be cured. That before all. And now Ananda, come with me to the Vimiera and decide upon her apartments. You should know something about her taste."

Ananda complied. But his manner now struck Dr. Lloyd as cold and preoccupied. He showed

no inclination to discuss Mrs. Vascher, and became like ice to his friend's glowing curiosity, launching himself upon a metaphysical argument with a deliberation that exasperated the Doctor. Lloyd had before now observed this peculiarity in Ananda, and especially when his emotional nature had been touched. It was as though afraid of his personality he had forced himself into a state of abstraction from his surroundings, and that while the outer self moved and spoke, the real self had been withdrawn beyond reach of circumstance.

Once only during the walk, while discoursing upon the position of Paley in regard to the theory of happiness, he kindled to enthusiasm.

"It is a paradox but it is true, when I say that to me pain is pleasure," he cried with dreamy fervour. "Oh, it is true that when an ant was crushed the Lord Buddha wept. The sympathy which identifies itself with an ant's pain, identifies itself also with the highest pleasure. I don't know the term 'righteous indignation.' There cannot be anger at that which is mean and base, but only pity. I joy in Joy. I grieve in Sin. That too is part of me. It is a part of the Universe; and I am of the Universe."

"This is not unselfishness," said Lloyd, impatiently. "It is a sublime egotism."

"It is both," replied Ananda. "There's another paradox. But Life is an enigma which can only be described by paradoxes."

They entered the Hôtel, and chose Mrs. Vascher's rooms, a sunny suite facing south. Lloyd then despatched a second telegram to await the *Orontes*, stating that all things were in readiness for his patient.

II.

On the evening of the following day, a note from the Hôtel Vimiera was brought to Dr. Lloyd. It was in the delicate hand-writing of a woman, and was signed "*Antonia Vascher.*" It apprised him of the arrival of his friend's wife, and of her wish to see him.

He went after a little while to the Hôtel and was shown to Mrs. Vascher's salon. As the door opened he became conscious of the fragrance of jasmine and tea-roses, and, somewhat to his surprise, saw that the table was covered with magnificent flowers arranged in bowls of Vallauris ware. The Venetian shutters were partly open, and the room was flooded with the soft evening light. At the first glance he saw that it had only one occupant, a young lovely woman who reclined upon a sofa drawn up to the fireplace, in which some fir-cones and logs of olive wood were blazing.

A light Eastern wrap was thrown over her feet. Her form, as she lay almost at full length, gave him the impression of being very tall and slender. She was dressed in a loose robe of pale yellow cashmere, profusely trimmed with lace, which heightened the lustre of her eyes and the transparency of her complexion. Prepared though he had been by Ananda, Dr. Lloyd was yet startled by her beauty, to which the traces of sickness, so plainly visible, and of pain bravely borne, seemed to impart a pathetic dignity that he had never seen equalled in the face of any other woman. There was something inexpressibly touching in the curves of those exquisite lips which could scarcely have been more bewitching when reddened by the bloom of health, and in the eyes of deepest blue that beamed with a languorous brilliancy due perhaps to the violet stains beneath their heavy lashes. She moved as he advanced, and extended her hand.

"You will forgive me for not rising, I am very tired after my journey. I wanted so much to see you, Dr. Lloyd, I felt that I could not rest without thanking you for all that you have done for me."

"You would not let me meet you at Marseilles," he said, as he took a chair beside her couch.

"Indeed, it was not necessary. The doctor of the *Orontes* put me into the train. And I should not have liked to encroach too much on your time, when you must have so many patients who need you perhaps more than I."

"I have not many patients," he replied, deliberately. "I tell you this at once, Mrs. Vascher, that you may understand how entirely I am at your service, and I could have no greater pleasure than being of use to my old friend Julian's wife."

She smiled with a child-like sweetness that was very captivating. "I am glad, for I like to have my doctor all to myself. Though I feel sorry for the people you do not help. Julian has told me how clever you are, and what wonderful cures you have made. I hope you will cure me."

"I feel certain that I can," he rejoined with earnestness; "and you must believe so, for that will go a long way towards the cure."

"I know a little about mesmerism," she answered. "I have been reading about Dr. Esdaile's experiments, I bring a great deal of faith."

"Well," he said, "you must tell me presently about yourself. But first of all do you like the situation of the hotel, and the rooms we have chosen?"

"I think they are perfect," she replied. "And how kind it was of Mr. Ananda to remember my passion for flowers, and to bring me such beautiful roses."

"Ananda!" exclaimed Dr. Lloyd. "You have seen him?"

"No; he left the roses a little while ago, but he would not come in. The view from these windows is beautiful, Dr. Lloyd. I longed so to get settled, and when I found your telegram at Marseilles, I determined to come on at once by the *rapide*, now I feel that if only Julian were with me I should be quite happy."

"You had a calm voyage?" he asked.

"Yes. I think the sea did me good. I had not so many attacks, and I was able to bear them without morphia. That made Julian so unhappy that I promised him to leave it off if I could. But it is very hard to think taking it wrong, when one is in bad pain."

"It is not wrong to do anything which relieves

pain. But we will try to find better means than morphine."

She glanced up at him. Hitherto she had apparently avoided meeting his eyes, which he kept steadily upon her. Now she turned hers away again immediately. He thought she was a little embarrassed.

"Are you trying to mesmerize me already," she asked, "that you look at me so earnestly?"

"No, not yet. The treatment must be begun systematically." He explained something of his method, and asked her several questions, which she answered unreservedly.

"Julian will be so relieved to know that I have found you," she said. "He put such confidence in you; and I will do the same, Dr. Lloyd. You shall praise me to him for being an obedient patient."

He did not at once reply. His mind was full of compassionate interest, and he was mentally planning the first steps towards her restoration to health. Suddenly she gave a little gasp and leaned back. He saw at once that a change had come over her, and started to her assistance. Her face had turned deadly white, her lips were

drawn together, her features pinched with agony.

She gazed up at him piteously, her eyes suffused with tears. "It has come on—the pain," she said, faintly. "Will you call Bridget, please —my maid. She knows what to do."

He went to the door of the inner room. The maid, a plain elderly woman, who was there unpacking, came at his summons to her mistress' side; and they both applied remedies, without avail. Antonia uttered stifled moans. It could be seen that the torture was excruciating. Dr. Lloyd took one of her hands, and fixing his eyes upon her and concentrating his will, tried the effect of magnetic passes. No result was immediately perceptible. Her condition was not sufficiently passive to facilitate the action of the odyle fluid. He desisted, wrung to the heart by her groans. "She must have some morphine," he exclaimed, seeing that strength was failing her, and that the dew on her forehead moistened the short rings of her hair. He took out his instrument and filled the syringe, but when he turned back to the couch, she lay drooping like a bruised flower, and he saw that she had fainted.

He bared her beautiful arm, limp and soft as snow, but warm still. His touch, thrilling with the nerve force that had streamed through it, roused her. She murmured and stirred. His hand faltered, as he performed the slight operation. The prick of the needle drew blood. He felt himself brutal. She opened her eyes.

"Thank you," she said. His heart ached at sight of the smile she forced to her lips. "Don't mind, Julian," she whispered; "it doesn't hurt so much now."

"Poor thing!" said the nurse aside. "She has got into the way of controlling herself, so that Colonel Vascher should not know how much she suffers."

Never had Dr. Lloyd experienced such an anguish of pity. Case-hardened though he had believed himself, his susceptibility afflicted him with a shock of surprise. He felt that he would almost lay down his life if by so doing he could bring back health to this fragile, suffering creature. He sat by her side while the morphine did its work of alleviation, and continued his passes, now over the face, now over the limbs of Antonia, as though he wished to bathe her in

the mysterious emanations sent forth by his quivering fingers. At intervals, she would glance up at him and smile with drowsy sweetness. The pink had returned to her lips and faintly tinged her cheek. He fancied that her eyes lingered longer on his, while over her face and form there seemed to have crept an indefinable softness and relaxation that was all in keeping with the darkening room, the electrically charged atmosphere, the powerful scent of the roses.

As the pain lulled, and there stole over both a sense of expansion and *rapport*, he talked to her in a low soothing voice of every-day topics, touched by the gentle emotion of the hour and the influences in play, paving the way for confidence and closer intimacy. He left her at last eased and inclined to sleep, promising that he would come early on the morrow.

In the morning he passed by the concierge and walked straight to Mrs. Vascher's apartments, which were on the first floor of the hotel. It annoyed him to see that there were children playing in the corridor; and he blamed himself for neglect-

ing to provide against contingencies, when, on turning back, the concierge informed him that a large family—the famille Bingham—tenanted the salon adjoining that of Mrs. Vascher.

Bridget, the maid, replied to his knock, and conducted him to her mistress's bed-room. Obeying his injunctions Antonia had not risen. She was still pale, but no longer in pain. She greeted him familiarly, with gratitude in her smile. Her thick brown hair, with glints of gold in its waves, lay loose on the pillow. He thought her even more lovely than on the previous evening. Accustomed though he had once been to the luxurious accessories of the bedchamber of a woman of taste and fashion, and the daintinesses of apparel reserved for its sanctity, a tremor of artistic pleasure seized him as he noted the delicate texture of the muslin and the fineness of the lace which veiled the outlines of her shoulders and bosom, and out of which gleamed her lovely throat and half-bared arms; and as his eyes rested upon the exquisite contours of her limbs, partly defined beneath the clinging draperies that enfolded her. When he saw that a drooping yellow rose lay between her fingers, he was

stirred by the faintest disagreeable sensation. It troubled him that Ananda, and not, he had been the donor. The feeling intensified as, after some conversation concerning her health, she fell into silence, during which she toyed with the blossom. Lifting it to her lips she seemed with her breath to caress the petals, and looked up at him with full, languid eyes. "I love roses," she said.

The gesture, the tone, the simple words moved him as a balmy summer breeze may bring ripples to the surface of a smooth lake. They seemed to imply a subtle change in her, an unconscious allurement—he hardly knew how to characterize it. He only felt that she was different from what she had been yesterday. Bridget had withdrawn; but he could hear her moving in the salon. "Would you like me to magnetize you now?" he asked abruptly. "I am anxious to establish a complete *rapport* before the pain returns again. By degrees, I hope to banish it altogether."

She raised herself a little and threw back her hair. "Yes; please begin now," she said. "I want to know what it feels like."

He drew his chair nearer to her and took her

hands, pressing his thumbs against hers, and keeping his eyes on her.

"Have you any curiosity about sensation?" he asked.

"Oh, is there any woman who does not sometimes feel in her nature springs which, if touched, would thrill her through and through!" She spoke dreamily. "Dr. Lloyd, I puzzle myself. I should like to tell you about thoughts—feelings I have—which perhaps you would help me to understand."

"Tell me," he said softly.

"By-and-by, perhaps. I cannot express them in words. It is when one draws in the perfume of a flower, when the warm wind makes our nerves quiver, when we—when we love," her voice faltered, "and are near the one loved, there, there comes the certainty that there is something more—something supremely exquisite, if we could only reach it—if only the thrill would intensify."

"It could not," he said, in a strange way. "At that point we should die."

They were both silent.

"Your hands are a little hot," he said presently,

in the calm tone which was beginning to impress her with a sense of being dominated. "Lie against the pillows—so. Another one would be an improvement. May I call your maid? I fancy that she thought I was performing incantations yesterday. I will assure her that I don't mean anything uncanny."

Antonia laughed. "Bridget is an excellent old thing, and very attentive to me. She doesn't know much about mesmerism, but she quite expects something in the shape of virtuous magic which is to do me good."

Bridget listened with stolid respect to Dr. Lloyd's exposition of the elementary laws of human magnetism. Antonia listened too. It pleased her that he should take pains to make his theories intelligible to her maid. Bridget had heard of—nay had once touched an electric eel, and she had received a shock from a galvanic battery. As soon as she heard that magnetic baths were to form part of the treatment, she drew a corollary from those two facts in nature and science, and required no further enlightenment. When Dr. Lloyd impressed upon her the necessity for conducting his operations without noise, or

outside disturbance, she shook her head despairingly. "That'll never be managed here, Sir; listen now." The children in the corridor were uproarious at their play; and from the tennis court below laughter rose. "But I thought, Sir," added Bridget mysteriously, "that once they were got off, needles nor cannon wouldn't wake them."

"I don't want to put your mistress right off," said Dr. Lloyd, "I want to soothe her gradually. Never mind, I will think of a suitable arrangement."

"Oh!" cried Antonia, "don't interfere with the children. I like them to be happy. I am fond of children. I wish——"

She paused and coloured slightly. She had often wished for a child.

Dr. Lloyd stood up, and threw all his energy into some powerful passes. The vague wonder in Antonia's eyes deepened. "It's very strange," she said. "I like the feeling; it's exhilarating. Something seems to draw my body, and my limbs tingle. What is it?"

"It is the mesmeric fluid," he answered. Reichenbach's odyle — the vital forces with

which I am reinvigorating your exhausted nervous system."

"Do you think that you did anything for me yesterday?" she asked. "May I talk?"

"Yes, certainly. Try to be unrestrained, and obey your impulses. All I wish is that you shouldn't oppose your will to mine."

"My will would not be strong enough to resist yours."

"Perhaps not, but it would delay good results."

"Are you certain that they will be good?"

"I have every reason to feel so," he replied; "are you not now comfortable and at ease?"

"Ah, I was not in pain, but I had such strange dreams last night. I felt quite unlike myself this morning. That made me ask whether you had done anything for me yesterday."

"Possibly. But it is difficult to tell how far I affected you, because of the morphia."

"I never felt quite like that when they gave me morphia before," she said.

"Were the dreams happy ones?"

"Yes. I think so. I am not sure. They were strange." She spoke in a wandering way,

and turned more towards him, as he seated himself again. She lay for a few moments, as if under a spell, with her lips partly unclosed, and her breath coming more quickly. Her bosom began to heave in slow undulations. With a gesture of unconscious *abandon* she threw her arm above her head, and her hand lay upon the pillow, the delicate pink palm uppermost. Her eyelids drooped. "Are you willing me to do anything?" she murmured.

"I am going to will you to sleep. I think that would be good for you."

"I feel so drowsy," she murmured, nestling her cheek against her arm. "But the children distract me."

"I do not think I shall be really successful with you here," he said. "I have been thinking that it would be better if once a day you came to my house. You will have your electrical bath, and then I will magnetize you in a room where all the conditions will be favourable."

She lay with eyes closed. Presently she uttered a confused sound. "How strange!" she murmured. "I see a room—I feel sure it is yours. I've never been there before."

He started and bent over her, turning pale in his excitement. "Tell me what you see," he said.

"There don't seem to be any windows. It is hung with blue silk, that gleams. The light is so lovely. Oh, it is electric light. There are strange things floating about; they're like white shadows. Oh! how beautiful!" She sighed as if in ecstacy. "Oh! do not go. Now it is all getting dark. I don't see the light."

He waited, still directing the nerve force upon her, and presently asked her if she saw again, but she only sighed gently, and was quiet, and then he knew that she had passed into a peaceful sleep.

He sat beside her for a little while. To watch her as she lay thus in her perfect beauty, warm, living, rose-flushed, was to feed his keenest artistic perceptions, and to kindle the more human instincts which had been held in abeyance. And then, also, there was intellectual excitement in the discovery of her latent clairvoyant faculties, in thought, and of the vistas opened to him. He tore himself reluctantly away. A patient in Nice claimed his attention.

He promised himself, however, to return later in the day, and, if medical observation should show that his ministrations were beneficial, to take Antonia to his house, and lay all in train for the future.

An impulse of which he was half ashamed prompted him before he moved away, to take up the rose which her lips had touched. And while driving through Nice, in obedience to another impulse equally imperious, he stopped at a florist's, and purchased a sheaf of the roses she loved.

All day he was troubled by a vague unrest, a desire to yield himself to reverie, not of a philosophical nature, and to visions of that recumbent form, of the pink-palmed hand and soft, round arm, on which the angry spot made by the point of the morphia needle was like a reproach to him for desecrating its whiteness.

His analytical habits of thought made him observe the science of the sensations she evoked, and he reasoned, that since he could so analyse them, they must be as it were, outside his personality. She was like a beautiful picture, he said, and in that way affected his senses. It was

to the artist in him that she appealed, not to the man. She was his friend's wife, his patient, confided to his honour, protected by a triple tie. The idea was preposterous. Nay, did she not represent also the fulfilment of his aspirations after the occult life of purity, of knowledge, of superhuman power? Her magnetic atmosphere, untainted by any grossness of living, would be his medium of access to the Adepts, those guardians of highest wisdom; her soul should be his guide into unknown regions, and should unfold to him the pages of the Astral Book. But the *woman* clung to his imagination. Her very name even, "Toni," uttered below his breath, set his pulses faintly throbbing, the scent of the roses he had bought recalled her. At last, by an effort of will he forced his thoughts into other grooves, and set himself to study till four chimed, the hour he had mentally appointed for his visit to the hotel.

Antonia was risen and dressed: and his first glance at her assured him that physically she had derived no ill from his essay at healing. She looked less fragile. Her face was not so pale. There was more elasticity in her gestures; and

her manner was animated, even vivacious. She acquiesced with evident pleasure in his proposal that he should conduct her to the Château, and cause Bridget to be initiated into the mysteries of the Baths. They went out to the garden of the hotel, and then, leaving it, he led her by a zig-zag path through the olive groves, up the hill, on the summit of which Monte Santo was built.

Antonia was delighted with the view of the old town and of the Château, as, during the ascent, it opened upon her, and shook her head playfully when, in capacity of physician, he rebuked her eagerness to explore the narrow streets of Monte Santo, examine the church, and climb the ruined fortifications. It was strange to remark how rapidly their intimacy had grown; and from her manner a stranger would have inferred that she had known him for years instead of hours.

He watched her with absorbing interest. And now he observed in her an *abandon*, a plasticity, a susceptibility to external influences which he did not connect with his earliest impression of her. Her moods reflected her surroundings.

When in the sunshine and among the flowers on the marble terraces of the hotel garden, she showed the unconscious gaiety of a child. Then, as she leaned upon his arm ascending the hill, where the weird shadows cast by the olives met their steps, where the earth gave forth moist exhalations, and the scent of hyacinths and tuberoses weighted the air, her form swayed with greater pliancy, and her smile and her eyes gained a more seductive sweetness; while under the grey old walls, and in face of the mouldering shrine, she seemed affected by the traditions and associations that haunted the place.

Dr. Lloyd first showed his visitors the Bath-room, a late addition to the Château; and, leaving Bridget to make acquaintance with the woman in charge, he brought Mrs. Vascher to the palm-bordered terrace which stretched below his study.

Here they came upon Ananda in his favourite attitude of contemplation, extended upon a bamboo lounge, his cigarette in his mouth, and his eyes turned upward to the sky.

The Hindoo started to his feet as Mrs. Vascher approached. She advanced to him with out-

stretched hand, but drew it back, remembering that Ananda's peculiar tenets did not sanction the ordinary mode of salutation. "Mr. Ananda," she exclaimed, "I want to thank you for having been so thoughtful as to send me the beautiful roses."

Ananda was still, it appeared, in the realms of abstraction, yet another self seemed to gaze somewhat anxiously from his eyes, behind the outer man who greeted Antonia with a cold formal courtesy hardly in keeping, Lemuel thought, with his gift of flowers, and implied intimacy with her in India. He asked for news of Colonel Vascher, and then for the first time Dr. Lloyd noted in his mind that Antonia had not once that day alluded to her husband. The mention of his name, and the recall to her old life, seemed to come upon her with something of a shock. She looked painfully agitated, and gazed round with an expression of bewilderment. But she recovered herself quickly.

"Oh my poor Julian!" she exclaimed. "He suffered so on my account. How happy he would be to see me now well, and in such good spirits. I don't know why it is," she added, glancing at Dr. Lloyd, and then turning away her eyes with

a slight access of colour. "I feel as though I had been drinking moral champagne. My heart is so light, and I take a kind of physical delight in the beauty around me, like a bird or an animal. It seems wicked to be so free from care when Julian is far away."

Ananda gazed at her earnestly.

"I have heard other people, whose nervous organizations were highly strung, say that the air of the Riviera produced that effect upon them before they had become acclimatised," remarked Dr. Lloyd, constrainedly.

"I hope that I may never become acclimatised," exclaimed Antonia. She seated herself upon a cane chair, and, taking off her hat, leaned her head back. "The sky is so blue," she continued. "The sea is so blue too, and the flowers are so sweet. The wind seems to be telling a story, like the wind in a dream."

"What story does the wind tell you?" asked Ananda, absently.

"The story of Spring," she replied, turning to him. "Do you remember, Ananda, a Sanscrit poem you read and translated to me? Everything to-day reminds me of it. The God of Love

passed by. The flowers thrilled into beauty and fragrance; the bee drank honey out of the same flower-cup with his mate; the embrace of the creeper in blossom became closer to its beloved tree—and—Does it not go so? ah, say it again, Ananda!"

Ananda was silent for a few moments, his dark spiritual eyes fixed upon the sea line.

"You mean the *Kumara Sambhaba*," he said. "It is this."

He broke into a melodious sort of chant, uttered in a strange liquid tongue, the notes of which seemed to breathe nature's sweetest harmonies, the cooing of birds, the joyous rustling of forest trees, the fervid murmurs of summer breezes—he paused. His face seemed for the moment transfigured with purest poetry, and again he spoke in that wonderful language, his voice vibrating with an unearthlike passion:

"Sangama viraha vikalpè
Paramiha viraho na sangama,
Sangè Saiva tathaiká stasya,
Trivuvana mapi tánonayam virahè."

"What is the translation of that?" asked Lloyd.

"It is a Sanscrit love-song," replied Ananda, rising. "I do not know how to say it. There

are ideas in our Eastern poetry," he went on, "so subtle, so delicate, that the Western mind cannot conceive, far less express them. The meaning is this. A lover tells his mistress that he prefers her absence to her presence, for he says:

> "'*Should cruel fate e'er lead this faithful heart*
> *To choose my love from her own absent self,*
> *I'd prefer to lose her from these eyes;*
> *With her, I've her alone—lost all beside*
> *Without, the regions three by her are filled.*'"

III.

ANANDA moved a few paces, but presently returned. "Lemuel," he said in an altered tone, "the air grows chill. Shall I turn doctor in your stead and warn Mrs. Vascher against the dangers of a Riviera sunset?"

Lloyd roused himself with a start. He offered Antonia his arm, and they ascended the stone steps and entered the library. She examined it with interest.

"This is not the room you saw?" he said tentatively.

She did not appear to comprehend him. "I have not been here before," she replied simply.

He perceived that she had no recollection of her glimmering vision of the morning.

"Is this where you work and see your patients?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered; "but I will show you my sanctum in the tower, which is sacred to our occult

studies and to my magnetic experiments, and has been remodelled in accordance with Ananda's theories. Don't look alarmed, Mrs. Vascher," he added; "it is no sorcerer's chamber. Ananda will have nothing to do with the vulgar paraphernalia of magic. All that he allows one are rods of different kinds of metal and wood, which have certain affinities with the elements, and influence our electrical condition."

He drew aside the plush curtain, and opened a door which it concealed. They found themselves in a square, lofty room, lighted by an electric globe, and lined with pale blue silk. At first it appeared that there were no windows or means of free ventilation, but the cool freshness of the atmosphere proved that there must be some cunning arrangement above for the admission of air. The carpet was of a yellow colour, which threw into relief the somewhat sombre furniture. Low divans, luxuriously upholstered, were ranged here and there against the wall. A couch of peculiar construction, and with glass feet, was placed nearer the centre. Its head lay northward, and above it was suspended a large horse-shoe magnet. Near the fire-place was a comfortable-

looking double writing-table, on which were some manuscripts, books in attractive bindings, and dainty modern appliances, such as might be seen in a county house library. There were a few handsome and valuable chairs of répoussé leather; and small massive tables, one of which supported a crystal bowl filled with the roses, which reminded Dr. Lloyd of Antonia, stood here and there. Except a closed cabinet, a row of book-shelves and some apparatus for chemical experiments, there was no other furniture in the apartment. The effect produced by the combination of colouring, the yellow carpet, the blue walls, and the silvery illumination of the electric light, was fantastic in the extreme; but if peculiar, the room was in all respects attractive, and did not suggest anything weird or awesome. Antonia's face wore a puzzled expression. "Oh, what a beautiful light!" she exclaimed. "How strange it all is! And yet," she added thoughtfully, "it doesn't seem quite strange either. I think that once I must have been here in a dream." She stooped over the bowl of roses. "My flowers!" she said, and moved about inspecting the magnet and the various properties scattered about, and asking questions.

"Will you rest here, Mrs. Vascher?" said Lloyd, pointing to the couch, which was low and furnished with downy cushions. "Let me take your hat, and now lean your head back." He drew a rug over her feet, and adjusted the pillows. "I think you will allow that the conditions of this room are more favourable to mesmerization than at the hotel."

Antonia did as he bade her. "Tell me," she said, "why are the walls hung with silk, and why do you guard yourself so carefully from the outer world?"

"For the same practical reason that your sofa is made of glass, and that I asked you to wear a dress of woollen material in preference to silk. For the purpose of insulation. It is our object to keep the magnetism pure and to turn back hostile currents. You must ask Ananda to explain the laws of occult physics," he added smiling.

They looked round, but Ananda was not to be seen. He had slipped away, leaving them alone.

"Shall I call him?" asked Dr. Lloyd. "Would you like him to be present while I mesmerize you?"

"No," she returned: "I think Mr. Ananda finds me frivolous, and that he does not care to be in my society."

He began his passes. She yielded readily to the influence. Hardly a minute elapsed before her head drooped and her features assumed that mobile expression, that intensely feminine charm, which so captivated him. Her eyes were still open, but gazing up to his—they swam in a delicious languor.

Presently, at his will, she closed them. He bent over her, and his breath stirred the little rings of hair upon her brow. She was quite still, sleeping, as it seemed, like a child tired with play.

But his heart was beating. He moved from the couch, angry at his own weakness, forcibly crushing back the fiery impulses which would not suffer him to gaze at a beautiful woman without emotion. Was this the passionless calm of the philosopher? This, the only fruit his efforts at self-repression had borne? He went to the writing-table, and, being seated, tried to compose himself into a frame of mind suitable to the scientific investigator of psychic mysteries.

He returned once more to where she lay. The roses' scent, or a perfume more delicate, more subtle, which she herself seemed to exhale, caressed his senses. How exquisite was the curve of her cheek—the warm soft flesh which he longed to kiss. Toni! Magic word! More potent than the spells of the Alchemists. He must speak it aloud.

"Toni!"

Her lips murmured responsively. Irresistible temptation! He kneeled by her. He touched with his own the hand which lay like warm snow on her bosom. "Where are you, Toni?"

She spoke. The utterance was confused and indistinct. He strained his ear to listen. "Speak louder, Toni."

"I am by the sea. I am in Egypt. It is a long, long stretch of sand, so lonely! The waves roll in on the dead beach. The dead desert lies beyond. The sun is setting, and the sand is like blood; and the sea is of blood with a light on the foam. There is a great black column by the shore. It casts a deep shadow. The shadow meets the sea and turns to blood . . . and I see a woman standing in the shadow—a black woman; and she holds a dead child in her arms."

There was silence for a few moments. The mesmeric fluid seemed to quiver as it was projected from the fingers of the operator. Antonia spoke. "She breathes upon the child's face, and it is dead no longer: it lives. And she breathes once more, and now it is dead again. There is a man beside the shadow. He comes near me. He fixes his eyes upon me. . . He fills me with fear. . . And yet—he is so beautiful."

"Describe him," commanded the mesmerist.

"He is very tall. His skin is dark. He is like an Egyptian; and he has black eyes which pierce me through. His face is full of intellect and majesty, but it is sad—oh, so sad," she spoke in pitying accents. "It looks as though he had never smiled. His hair hangs below his shoulders. He wears a white dress almost to his feet, and a turban with red in it. Now he is speaking."

"What is it that he says?"

She raised her head a little, and seemed to be listening.

"He tells me that he has marked me out and watched me for long. That the strange yearnings I have felt at times, for more perfect happiness—more exquisite enjoyment—are the struggles of my

inner self towards that fulness of life which he says may be mine. He tells me, that through your instrumentality, my psychic faculties may be developed and my finer senses sharpened. He bids me follow him, and he will show me secrets of nature."

She paused. Trembling with eagerness, yet fearful lest his self-control and, with it, his power might forsake him, Lloyd kept his eyes fixed upon her, and concentrated his will with an intensity of purpose that might almost have enabled his spirit to free itself and traverse space. He waited in breathless suspense. For a little while she was silent. Then a deep-drawn, wondering, exclamation broke from her.

"Ah!"

"Where are you?" he asked.

"I am in a cave. There are rocks all round, and sculptured pillars. It is like a temple. I see men in long white garments with shaven heads. I think they are priests. One of them steps forward. He is not shaven like the rest, but wears a red cap; and he carries a rod—No!" she shuddered; "it is a snake. He traces with it all round him on the floor of the temple

which is covered with sand. The priests put burning lamps where he has traced in the figure of a triangle interlaced with a circle." . . . She waited. "Now one pours something on the ground and a mist rises. It is grey at first—and now it is getting red, and I see shapes in it. . . . Ah!" she uttered a stifled shriek; "I can't look. Take me away."

She struggled as though to free herself from invisible bonds. Her tones were shrill, and yet sounded far away; her eyes, open now, glassy, and, as it were, transfixed with terror. "Oh, it is horrible!" she cried. "No, no, I don't want to know your secrets." Her shuddering became more violent, her limbs were convulsed, and she writhed on the couch. In alarm, he made some rapid reverse passes. Withdrawn from the influence which appeared so to terrify her, she grew calmer; the frenzied movements ceased, and her eyes closed, though she moaned a little like a child sleeping, yet half conscious of pain. Gradually, however, the moans died away. He feared to awaken her suddenly, and sat by her while she slept, his mind and his emotions in a tumult. Into what mysteries had she been on the point of

initiation? Could he dare again confide her to the guidance of this mysterious Being, who, for the moment, he doubted not, was connected with the Brotherhood of Adepts, the custodians of occult secrets? He was sufficiently versed in the science of mesmerism to be aware that he had the power of limiting his subject's experiences on the astral plane. To stand back on the very threshold of the Immeasurable region would be a sacrifice almost beyond him; but to proceed in face of possible bad results to her would be worse than cruelty. Could it be that the failure arose from his own incapacity to receive the Higher Knowledge. He knew that perfect purity of life and thought were essentials to its attainment. As he pondered, a knock sounded, and Ananda entered.

The Hindoo glared half apprehensively at Antonia's prostrate form. Evidently relieved by her now tranquil appearance, he said,

"I see that she is in a magnetic sleep. Does your treatment promise well?"

Dr. Lloyd rose, and paced the room before he replied.

"There has been no return of pain since I magnetised her yesterday. I have every

reason to hope that I am doing her good. Ananda," he added, with some agitation, "I was right; she is clairvoyante." And he related briefly what had occurred.

Ananda listened with the deepest attention. His face was grave and concerned. He made Dr. Lloyd repeat the description of the Egyptian's dress, and also of the High Priest's headgear; then stood for a few moments silent and thoughtful.

"Lemuel," he said at length, "we will talk of this by-and-by. In the meantime it is getting late. Had you not better awaken Mrs. Vascher. If she appears unconscious of her vision, do not tell her of it."

Antonia awoke with a deep sigh. She showed some slight symptoms of distress and bewilderment, but these passed off after a few moments, and she spoke in a natural manner. "I feel," she said, looking at Lloyd with her soft, charming smile, "as though I had taken chloroform or laughing-gas; and I have a vague unpleasant impression of having gone somewhere and done something—I don't know where or what." She turned and surprised Ananda's gaze. "Ananda," she ex-

claimed, "you told me, when I once described to you my feelings after taking laughing-gas in India, that my soul had been wandering. Do you think my soul wandered just now?"

"Perhaps," replied Ananda; "but since you do not know where it went, that is of but little consequence to you."

"On the contrary," returned Antonia, "to remember one's dreams might be to live in a world more beautiful than the reality."

She sighed softly, and her eyes shining with a dreamy lustre, meet those of Lloyd. His eyes had been ardently watching her. He wondered if she had heard his impassioned utterance of her name. He fancied, as she rose from the couch, and took up the hat he had laid on a divan, that there was an indefinable consciousness in her air and her face. It was like the look of a woman who has half granted a caress and, who in mingled distrust and fascination, coquets with her impulses. But if Antonia were affected by the strange intoxication which overpowered Lloyd, she herself was but dimly aware of it. She was like a person under the influence of a drug which seems in some strange way to blend illusion and sensation.

They left the mesmeric room and went out on to the terrace. There they found Bridget waiting and relieved at the sight of her mistress. Antonia said little. She accepted Lloyd's arm, and returned Ananda's farewells. They descended the zigzag path, neither speaking. Her contact thrilled him. He would gladly have prolonged the walk. The twilight, the heavy odours, the olive shadows seemed to wrap them round as if with a veil, and he was gnawed by a faint sensuous desire which yet seemed to bring its own satisfaction. As he parted from her at the entrance to the hotel he said, "You have not told me yet whether my treatment is agreeable to you or not."

She paused before replying. "I don't know, I feel so strange . . . . It—it excites me, and gives me a feeling here," she touched her heart. "I don't know if it is quite pleasant. I like it best, I think, when you don't put me to sleep, but when you sit beside me and soothe me, and make me feel happy. I know that I am safe then; but when I am asleep I don't know what happens to me."

"Do I soothe you, and make you feel happy?" he said very low, releasing her hand.

"You shall be safe. I will not put you to sleep."

Later on, Dr. Lloyd began to question Ananda as to his ideas concerning the chief personage of Antonia's vision.

They were in the library at the Château, not the occult room, as it was called, in which they usually passed their evenings. Dr. Lloyd felt a sudden impulse, the sources of which he dared not analyse, to keep that apartment sacred as far as might be possible to Antonia Vascher; and his guest, with the instinctive courtesy which characterizes the high-bred Hindoo, divined his disinclination to follow their usual habit, and made no proposal to quit the library.

Ananda lay half buried in a large arm-chair close to the fire,—he revelled in warmth and sunshine,—smoking meditatively while he rolled cigarettes between his thin pliant fingers. He handed one to his friend without answering the question which had been put to him. Dr. Lloyd lighted the cigarette, but laid it down after a whiff or two. "Ananda," he said, "you know how earnestly I have longed that one of your masters would make himself visible to me in the astral

body, but you have always told me that my magnetism has not been sufficiently purified to enable me to obtain that favour. You have said, however, that it would be possible for an adept to communicate with me through a mesmerized sensitive."

"I have said that it would be possible," replied Ananda, drawing in and expelling a cloud of smoke. "Lemuel," he exclaimed, "why have you so intense a desire for occult knowledge when Those who know have intimated that your strong passions, however closely you may keep them under leash, must always make it dangerous, almost impossible, for you to lead 'the life?'"

"I have proved that they can be controlled," rejoined Dr. Lloyd. "For the last four years my existence might have been that of a monk."

"Asceticism is not virtue," said Ananda; "and bad blood thrown into the system corrupts at the core."

"Why do I desire occult knowledge?" repeated Dr. Lloyd, not heeding the last remark. "Because there is an irresistible something within me urging me towards the unknown, the dark, the mysterious—a longing like thirst to solve the

problems of life and death—a consciousness of power to command the elemental spirits. At times, when I intensify my will and project the magnetic fluid—that master force which can compel nature to give up her secrets—I am almost intoxicated by this consciousness of power."

"You are right," said Ananda, "mesmerism is the key to every mystery in occult science. You have the power. But do you not see that the will-force may be as easily used to injure and destroy as to comfort and bless? It is but a turn of the handle which directs the stream this way, or that."

"You do not imagine that I would do anything that could injure Mrs. Vascher?" exclaimed Dr. Lloyd.

"Not consciously. It is well, though, that you should place the possibility before your mind. As a healthy vitality can be transmitted by a mesmerist pure in heart, so a destructive and brutalizing influence may be thrown upon the nervous system of a chosen object of desire or malice, provided there be some moral taint in the nature of the victim. It is nothing that the evil germ has lain unsuspected. It was there like a hidden

cancer. The mesmeric *rapport* calls it into activity; and before the foul magnetic tide, honour, happiness,—all are swept away."

Ananda, overpowered by his emotion, spoke with impassioned fervour. Lloyd rose from his seat pale, shaken.

"How can you hint at so horrible a possibility in connection with a man such as I am—your friend, and the would-be disciple of your masters, and a woman noble and pure as Mrs. Vascher."

"I hint at it only," replied Ananda mournfully, "because I believe you to be true of heart, and because I know Antonia Vascher to be pure. Her purity is her safeguard against the evil influence which assailed her to-day."

"To-day" cried Lloyd in an agitated voice.

"Yes," said Ananda, "To-day; during her trance."

"Ananda," said Lloyd impressively. "The Oriental in a white dress, with the beautiful face and strange, sad eyes which Mrs. Vascher described, was surely one of the Great Occult Brotherhood who work for the good of men."

"You are mistaken," replied Ananda, rising to his feet. "That man was not one of these Great

ones who tread the fourth path of Holiness. He was a black magician, a follower of the left-hand path, a Brother of the Shadow."

There was a brief silence.

"How do you know this?" asked Lloyd.

"From the general features of the case. That sadness upon which Mrs. Vascher laid so much stress, and which comes from intensification of the will upon all that is gross, base, and sensual, is no characteristic of the true adept. The aim of real knowledge is happiness, and the first fruits gained by the aspirant are a lightness and buoyancy of spirit and a pure delight in the joys of nature, which seem to take him back to the sweetest days of childhood. Then also," continued Ananda, "a minor point which might seem to you unimportant—the wearing of red by Mrs. Vascher's astral guide and by the High Priest—convinced me that they belong to a school of Black Magic.

"I do not follow you," said Lloyd, again seating himself and bending towards Ananda, his face sharpened with intense interest.

"No!" said Ananda. "I am not able to explain fully. There is a law of correspondences in the occult world which cannot be violated,

The Dugpas, as we call these black magicians in the East, aim only at internal enjoyment, sensuality, the things of the flesh, which red, the blood-colour, typifies. The blood is the life. Seen in the light it is red, but the blood as it is seen through your veins is blue. It is red in its material aspect, blue in its higher one. Thus the colour of the true occultist is blue, and the Dugpa is forced to have some red about his person. It is an occult law. Also that pouring of blood on the ground is part of the ceremonial of evoking the worst elementals.

Lloyd shuddered. "And I exposed her to this!"

"Forewarned is forearmed," said Ananda. "It depends now upon your will whether her soul escapes from your control. The horror she expressed shows that she is not capable of being contaminated. Continue your treatment, Lloyd, only do not again throw her into a state of trance."

"I have already promised her that," said Lloyd in a low voice.

"Then all will be well. While your desires are pure, your magnetism will be beneficial and

healing; and you will have the happiness of restoring her to her husband freed from pain."

Lloyd did not speak. He left his seat and walked up and down the room as though his mind were filled with agitating thoughts. By-and-by he returned to his former position. Ananda had again buried himself in his armchair, and was composedly rolling cigarettes as before. The Hindoo's temperament was a source of frequent wonder to Dr. Lloyd. Ananda seemed to live completely in the moment. Emotion glided by him, and a brief access of excitement left him again placidly cheerful. It was one of his favourite sayings, "Do your day's work without motive and be happy:" and he would sometimes add, "I feel a criminal to my conscience, because it seems wrong to be happy when the world is so full of sorrow." He smiled now in answer to Lloyd's gaze, which was fixed curiously upon him.

"Do not be disturbed, Lemuel," he said. "Those who are true in heart have nothing to fear: the Dugpa cannot injure the pure and good."

"Tell me something about these Brothers of the Shadow," said Lloyd, abruptly.

Ananda resumed his conversational manner. He stretched himself out and talked, smoking the while. "There's a school of them in India, and one in Egypt. I should think this man is an Egyptian. One of the first dangers against which our masters warn their pupils is that to be feared from the Dugpas. These occultists become adepts for evil by the force of a concentrated selfishness. The first step towards black magic is in the use of mesmerism and psychic powers for selfish ends or base purposes. From this, the left-hand path is easy."

"Ananda," asked Lloyd, "have you ever been brought into contact with any of these men?"

"They have not injured me," replied Ananda, "I am merely a neophyte of the lower grade. I have developed no abnormal faculties, and so am guarded from dangers on the astral plane. Possibly my temperament may not be susceptible to such magnetism. Their attention is usually most attracted by those likely to advance in occultism, and the danger to these is great, if there be any leading passion in them upon which the Dugpa can operate. I have known cases in

which high students have been severely injured. It is one of the duties of our masters to counteract the evil work of the Brothers of the Shadow."

"For what reason do you suppose that Mrs. Vascher has been singled out by this man?" said Lloyd.

"Probably, because she has psychic faculties of a high order," answered the Hindoo thoughtfully, "and he wishes to use her as an instrument, but if I judge her rightly that cannot be." Silence fell again between the two. Dr. Lloyd did not pursue the subject, and after a little desultory conversation, Ananda rose and bade his host good night.

IV.

Dr. Lloyd sat up late, a prey to tormenting thoughts. Ananda's words had struck home. As he paced the lonely room, he wrestled honestly with emotions, which threatened to overpower his purer aspirations. It seemed to him that only now had he discovered the tremendous love-force pent up within him, and reasoning upon it even while he combated it, he told himself that it was no mere fleshly desire, but something stronger, holier, which under favouring circumstances might have metamorphosed him into a new being—a force that in his previous relations with women had never had free vent, an imperious want of his nature to which the gross and vulgar opportunities of life had not responded, and which had never till now found its ideal realization. For, again and again, he assured himself that it was not Antonia's beautiful form which he loved, but the soul that animated it—the soul that could

have supplied the all embracing, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional sympathy his own nature needed.

Was it not possible, he thought, that even now this love-force might exhale itself upon a higher plane of existence than that of mere physical manifestation. Is there not a divine poetry of love which transfigures sense? And, if this were so, why should he crush down his appreciation of her beauty; why cultivate a loathing for that which was not in itself unholy; why exhaust his energies in battling with the vehement longing which possessed him to be near her, to gaze into her eyes, to watch the play of her expression, to recall her during absence in ravishing visions? He had feared to enter the occult room, lest the spell of her presence lingering there still, should prove an enchantment too powerful. Each time in his walk, that he passed the veiled door, he had checked the impulse to open it. The clock struck twelve. Ananda had long since retired. How could he rest racked by this fever of the heart? A fancy seized him to test the magnetic virtues of the spot where she had lain. The idea of allowing his emotions natural vent was surely

a happy inspiration. To conquer a foe, it must be boldly met.

He drew the curtain and stood in the soft silvery light, now subdued by an opaque covering that dropped at evening, which illuminated the chamber like cold moon-rays. The scent of Antonia's roses filled the atmosphere. Her handkerchief had been dropped on the floor. He raised it reverentially to his lips. The pillows of the couch were yet indented by the pressure of her head. He placed himself beneath the magnet. A luxurious sensation of well-being and repose stole over him. Before long, he slept.

How long, he knew not. He awoke with a thrill of expectancy and excitement. He had a feeling of exhilaration which was yet not without a vague awe. The consciousness of a presence was so strong in him that he half rose and looked this way and that to convince himself that he was alone. Yes. If shape there were in the chamber, it was no corporeal one. The silvery rays streamed in all parts of the room, lighting up every nook and reflecting themselves back from the gleaming silk hangings.

He closed his eyes again. The exaltation of his nerves, however, banished slumber. It was as though he had quaffed some volatile and fiery elixir. That strange sense of a presence near him, became overpowering. Again he opened his eyes. This time he was not deceived. He uttered a cry of alarm and wonder, and started to a sitting posture. At the distance of a few paces from the couch stood a figure in a white woollen robe, which he recognized at once as that of Antonia's vision. The commanding stature, the pale olive face—superhuman in beauty. Yet almost demoniacal in its gloom, its utter lack of human sympathy and generous sentiment; the dark piercing eyes; the majestic port of head and neck; the long silky hair, and lofty brow surmounted by a turban of mingled white and blood-red—these could belong to none other than the Brother of the Shadow.

It was no spectral hallucination. Whether in the astral or the physical body, the man was living, moving, actual.

He carried a light, stout staff or wand, the top of which was surmounted with a cross-piece T—the Egyptian *Tau*. With this he traced a

luminous geometrical figure on the ground, his eyes, all the while, fixed steadily upon the doctor's face. This figure Lloyd recognized as the reversed pentagram. The single triangle instead

of being at the base, pointed towards the north, and thus represented the dominion of the evil principle in Nature.

"You are wrong," said the stranger, as if divining his thoughts, in a voice of bass *timbre*, but sweet and penetrating as a deep-toned bell.

"This has been the gigantic mistake of centuries. Neither principle in Nature can be justly called evil or good. Satan, the principle that has been denounced for ages, is the god of the world. Without him there would be negation. Jehovah and Satan are but brothers struggling together in a pleasant love-wrestle of exercise, by which the equilibrium of the Universe is preserved. No wonder that Humanity has made itself wretched. It will never be happy till it has acknowledged that evil and good are but opposing forces, either of

which might be termed good. Does not the Christian world even now adore God in the Devil and a Devil in God?"

The aptness of the paradox struck pleasurably upon Lloyd's intellectual perception. He laughed in a bewildered manner. His first feeling of alarm had left him. He sat up on the couch, would have risen, but his visitor motioned him to remain.

"I am glad to see that you don't resent my unceremonious intrusion," continued the deep musical voice, which was exercising a powerful fascination upon Lloyd. The accent was decidedly that of an Oriental, though the English was good, and Lloyd wondered how an Egyptian —for such he assumed this mysterious person to be—had obtained so perfect a mastery over the language.

"I once lived for several years in London," said the stranger again, answering an unspoken thought. "That was a very long time ago. Since then I have contented myself with excursions in the astral body. I first made your acquaintance there, Dr. Lloyd, though you are unaware of the fact. It may interest you to

know that I also made medicine the stepping stone to occultism. I have watched your progress with great interest, though till to-day I have found no opportunity of making myself known to you."

"I presume," said Lloyd, "that it is in the astral body I now see you."

"Precisely. There is a convenience in being able to penetrate closed doors, and to announce oneself without disturbing the household. Under ordinary conditions I might have run the risk of being treated inhospitably by your friend Ananda, who has no very flattering opinion of me, or at any rate pretends that he has not. I am pleased to find that, notwithstanding his warnings, you don't show any signs of alarm."

"The first lesson which the would-be occultist has to learn, is not to fear—even the powers of evil."

"Well said. But we shall quarrel over terms as long as you persist in believing that Satan and Jehovah are mortal enemies striving to destroy each other. However, this point we can discuss another time. Having established a *rapport*, I hope to dispense with such aids as this." He

lowered his staff and pointed to the magical figure which from a pale bituminous appearance had now intensified into a deep red. "There will be no further need for an intermediary. Mrs. Vascher is a good sensitive. The best, however, is but a poor kind of speaking box; and you must overcome her womanish terror of the unknown, before she can be of real use to you in unravelling Nature's knots. Your determination not to throw her into trance—at all events for a time—is a wise one. You now see that I have no evil designs upon your patient, and may continue your healing ministrations without any apprehension that I shall frighten her again. You are doing her a great deal of good. Magnetism is the only certain cure for a malady like hers."

"Who are you?" exclaimed Lloyd. "Since you know so much, you are aware that I am forewarned and forearmed against you."

The stranger smiled, contradicting Mrs. Vascher's fanciful assertion. But the smile it is true was saturnine, though it seemed to heighten the beauty of the face, and to intensify the lustre of those piercing eyes.

"Who are you?" repeated Lloyd. "I know that you are no true Adept."

"What constitutes Adeptship? The attainment of knowledge, of power, of happiness. Ananda declares happiness to be the aim of his philosophy. It is the aim of mine. In essentials, I am at one with the school of which he is the pupil. But I claim a more all-embracing knowledge. Yes, I am an Adept. But what I am named is of little consequence. You may adopt Ananda's term and call me a Brother of the Shadow, or, if you prefer it, simply Murghab the Egyptian."

"In other words, you profess Black Magic; and your powers are devoted to base purposes. Well, explain yourself, I am not afraid of you!"

"Friend Lemuel," said the Egyptian, "you will discover as you advance in wisdom, that prejudice and sectarianism exist not only in lower humanity. There is schism among the higher occultists—ay, and hypocrisy also. What if I were to tell you that Ananda, while he preaches a life of asceticism and theorizes upon moral purity, is in reality given over to the most sensual longings."

"I should not believe you."

The Adept smiled again.

"Well, it is not my business to unveil shams. In the first place, it would take too long, for there are so many of them. In the second, it is a thankless work, and I can aid mankind better by pointing out the true path to happiness."

"You talk of aiding mankind!" said Lloyd.

"Why not? For what reason do you suppose I have come to you? Since, as you will believe, I have the power to gratify my own desires, how can it benefit me to inform you that you may, if you choose, possess the same power. Let us talk sensibly. You want to know the laws of Nature. Do you imagine that you can learn them by disobeying Nature?"

"How?" asked Lloyd, in a startled voice.

"Are you not disobeying Nature, when you try to strangle your human sensibilities—your natural affections? These are the influences which, if allowed free operation, would call into manifestation the latent forces in you, now held down by the weight of asceticism. Trample on your passions and they will turn and sting you. Let them exhaust themselves upon the universe, and you have mounted many steps on the evolutionary

ladder. Can there be any more perfect development than that in which the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual faculties at once find their fullest realization. The discipline of asceticism may suit some temperaments, those in which the purely intellectual element is paramount—which have no craving for the higher joys of love. The philosophy that teaches contempt of love can only be imperfect and hurtful to the progress of such as you. Is it not in opposition to Nature's sublimest laws?"

There was a pause during which the magician, sad, cynical, cold, eyed Lloyd, who sat apparently absorbed in thought.

Murghab went on :—

"It has been truly said that the magnetism of love is the originator of all created things. Judge for yourself. Four years have passed since you renounced wine and meat, since you resolved upon a life of celibacy and absolute chastity. Are you any nearer your goal? In spite of your sleepless endeavours, have you made any practical advance in occultism? Yet it is a fact which Ananda and his masters cannot deny, that you have in you the potentialities of a master occultist."

"I feel it—I am certain of it," cried Lloyd, off his guard.

"There exists in Nature, as you well know," went on the evil Adept, "a force more powerful than the ordinary electricity, by the help of which, a single man able to grasp and direct it might change the face of the world. This is the great secret—the knowledge of its manipulation. Only those capable of absorbing and concentrating immense quantities of this most subtle fluid can become initiate of the Secret Brotherhood. You, Lemuel Lloyd, are one of those commanding souls. But till you give your nature free opportunities of development, you will never attain the Great Secret. A little while ago you yourself realized this truth."

There was silence for a moment: Lloyd seemed still lost in deepest meditation. His eyes were bent upon the ground. Raising them he met Murghab's gaze.

"Your reasoning is specious as that of the proverbial devil," said he, with an uneasy laugh. "My convictions are not so easily shaken however. Still, for form's sake, granting your argument, what is its practical bearing?"

The magician laughed also, "I have not come here in my astral body, with a bond all ready for you to sign, in which you shall agree to deliver up your soul to me, on condition that I confer upon you youth, wealth, love, and all the rest as per contract. I don't want your soul, or your personality either; and you are still far from mature years, are sufficiently endowed with this world's goods, and, without any aid from me, have the power to inspire with love the one woman you have met during your life, capable of responding to the needs of your nature. I only bid you think over all I have said, and when you have tried your life of abstinence a little longer, and are convinced that it is a mistake, I shall be happy to enlighten you further as to my views upon occultism. Now, before I go, I will show you two pictures in the Astral Light which will illustrate my meaning. Look."

He raised his wand and pointed to the wall opposite. At the same moment, there deepened in Lloyd that sense of expansion and exhilaration which he had experienced in a lesser degree upon becoming conscious of the magician's proximity. "You find my magnetism agreeable" said the

latter quietly, but Lloyd could not reply, so deeply absorbed was he in the vision which unfolded itself to him.

He saw, as it were, a symbolic representation of himself—his own face and form, aged by study, dried up by self-repression, dead, as it appeared, to life and joy—only the smouldering gleam in his eyes, telling of unsatisfied longings; dark narrowing walls closing him in, like the stones of a vaulted chamber; no companion, spiritual or human, to cheer his solitude—all hard, dull negation, dreariness, void.

Then, in an instant, the scene changed. A rosy light suffused the spot. He seemed gazing upon plains and distant heights illumined by a celestial radiance. Shadowy shapes of surpassing beauty hovered in the air. Flowers bloomed in profusion. Fruit hung temptingly. Rich perfumes intoxicated the senses. It was a Greek landscape. It suggested the revels of Olympus; and he himself stood in the foreground, as it were, a God-man power, intense capacity for enjoyment and for all the finer emotions, intellect, spirit embodied in the perfectly developed being who stepped to meet

the embraces of his beloved, his twin soul, his chosen mate.

The thrill from the imaged form seemed to communicate itself to his own frame. For there, reclining upon a mossy bank, with love-lustrous eyes turned towards him, and rose-flushed cheeks, with ripe lips parted in a smile of the most alluring sweetness, with arms half outstretched, the exquisitely outlined form curved in an attitude of enchanting grace, he beheld Antonia, the Toni of his waking dreams, the woman whom he loved with all the might of his soul.

"Toni," he murmured passionately, and sprang to his feet with arms extended also. . . . . But the faint illumination thrown by the electric globe, was now but as darkness compared to the vanished glory of the Astral Light. The vision had faded. The Brother of the Shadow was no longer to be seen. He was alone.

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Hardly knowing whether what he had seen and heard were nightmare or reality, Dr. Lloyd sought his chamber. He looked from the casement. The grey dawn was creeping up over the olive trees. The Hôtel Vimiera lay below him a

cold, white pile, silent and ghost-like. He undressed and lay down. Soon he was asleep again. It was his habit to rise early; but to-day, the sun was high before he awoke. The first object upon which his eyes rested, was a note directed in Ananda's handwriting, which had been brought in and placed by his bedside. It brought him a surprise, for it informed him of Ananda's sudden departure from the Château. The Hindoo stated that he had at an early hour received a summons from an Indian friend, an occultist now at Genoa, who wished to see him. In order to catch the morning train, it was necessary that he should leave Monte Santo at once. He would not awaken his friend, who seemed in the most profound sleep, and therefore wrote his adieux. He might be absent a week, perhaps longer. The hurried letter concluded with a hope that Lloyd's ministrations to Mrs. Vascher might prove beneficial, and that he would adhere to his determination, not again to throw his patient into a trance, and so expose her to maleficent influences.

Though unwilling to own, even to himself, that Ananda's presence was a restraint, Dr. Lloyd

breathed more freely now that he had gone. It would have irked him to recount his experiences of the previous night, and to hear Ananda's explanations, the point of which he could foresee. The insinuations of his strange visitant recurred hauntingly. The germ of distrust had lodged in his mind. He was conscious of a faint, indefinable jealousy. He envied Ananda his opportunities in India of companionship with Mrs. Vascher. He fancied that he read below the surface, and divined the Hindoo's true reason for wishing to study European civilization. It had been, he thought, torture to Ananda to witness the happiness of Antonia and her husband. He had dreaded lest her society should interfere with his occult training. In this respect, Lloyd gave Ananda credit for sincerity, and he put aside the suggestion that his friend's life was not what it appeared. But who knew better than Lloyd what hidden tumult may rage in the breast of man!

It seemed to him that since Antonia's arrival there had crept over Ananda a subtle yet unmistakable change. Various little episodes occurred to him—the gift of roses; the tone in

which her familiar name "Toni" had been uttered —the only time he had heard it pass Ananda's lips; the recitation of the Indian poem, and the curious emotion in Ananda's voice, quickly subdued, yet evident, and unlike his ordinary calm or abstract enthusiasm.

Antonia was in the garden when Dr. Lloyd called at the hotel, to inquire for her health and to arrange for her visit to him that afternoon. He had placed a strong check upon himself, and his manner was grave, courteous, and professional.

She herself seemed even more lighthearted than upon the day before, and her look of elasticity and of renewed strength struck him with greater force. He felt the genuine and unselfish joy of the *physician* when she thanked him for doing her so much good. It was seldom, she said, that twenty-four hours went by without gnawing discomfort even where there was not violent pain; and now since the commencement of the magnetic treatment she had been completely at ease. And all this she owed to him! She was eager to continue the course. It was settled that she should come with Bridget to the Château a little

earlier than yesterday, take her first electric bath and then submit to magnetization.

He left her, his restlessness subdued; and as he drove towards Nice, he dwelt, with a quiet tenderness which deceived him into self-confidence, upon her renewed vigour, her sweetly expressed gratitude. The perturbations of yesterday had subsided. This he believed due to the self-confession which had relieved him of fancied guilt. He reproached himself for a want of that fine perception which would have enabled him to distinguish readily between the lower forms of love and the sympathetic friendship, the delicate appreciation of truly feminine charm which he now persuaded himself was the root of his feeling for Antonia. He hailed it as the first effect of her refining influence that he could now so separate the two. Why should he fear to let his heart expand, as a flower might under the sun's rays. He accounted for the first flush of ardent longing by the law of reaction, and the rebound of his impulses turned forcibly from a direction which he had imagined injurious to his spiritual development. True development, he told himself, was not to be achieved by the arbitrary crushing of human

sensibilities, but rather by gentle purification of the desires, by a gradual transformation of the physical into the emotional, and of the emotional into the spiritual. So he reasoned to himself it would be well that he should give rein to his æsthetic cravings, and feast them upon Antonia's beauty, that he should steep his imagination in dreams of a poetic and elevating love. He would cultivate Antonia's society, would draw forth and revel in every charm and grace of her form and mind; and as their intercourse became unembarrassed, a pure and ennobling interest would be added to his life, and vistas of unexplored delights would open before him.

He avoided the occult room that day, but magnetised her in the library, merely soothing her by passes into a semi-somnolent state, during which she retained her susceptibility to outward surroundings. She talked dreamily of herself, of her impressions of life, her thoughts and feelings in a frank abstract way that fascinated him beyond measure. There seemed to creep over Antonia while under his mesmeric influence a soft expansiveness that deepened at moments into almost passionate sympathy. She herself appeared

hardly aware of this, though it affected him deeply ; and, when he was not directly operating upon her, she glided back into her ordinary manner, which was by turns gay and faintly agitated. Several days went by, and he continued the process, never allowing her to fall into trance, but keeping her in a sort of half dream. He observed that his magnetism, as is the case with some narcotics, at first excited her, and then, in proportion to its intensity, produced the pleasant languor, the emotional responsiveness, and the sort of *fantasia*, through which, all the while, there ran a thread of self-consciousness, that can only be likened to intoxication by haschisch, at once intellectual and sensuous.

But in contradistinction to that drug, it left no baleful after-effects. Every day she grew stronger, her mental faculties seemed more active, and she surprised him by the vividness of her imagination and the poetic beauty of her drowsy utterances.

He could not always keep sufficiently cool to note and analyse her moods in their varying aspects. It was as though the mesmeric fluid set loose, acted and re-acted upon both ; and sometimes he would demagnetise her, hardly

knowing whether hours or minutes had been passed under this delicious glamour, her hands in one of his while he held the other upon her forehead. Thus they would talk in low tone, a soothing ripple of the *nothings* which so soon become the *everything* in such converse, and he would watch her face, discovering in each prof longed contemplation some dimple or depression, or enchanting curve which he had not before noted. Recalled to the world, she would slowly rouse herself as if reluctant to resume the conditions of every day life. She would blush, and look up at him questioningly, as though she were not quite sure of what had been said, and whether the impressions that vaguely embarrassed her, had any ground in reality. Her eyes would droop before his gaze, and he would see the glamour gradually fade, never entirely vanishing, but lingering in her movements, her glances, in a more tender intonation of her voice; he himself maintaining the grave, quiet manner which always reassured her. Then by an effort he would turn the conversation into impersonal channels, now interesting her in some chemical experiment, now showing her books and drawings, till she would

declare herself horrified at the discovery that twilight was falling. They would descend the stair-case to find Bridget slumbering peacefully on the terrace, or gossiping with the bath-keeper as far as the limited English of the latter would permit.

V.

At the end of a week Ananda had not returned. A letter which Dr. Lloyd received from him, told that he had gone with his occult friend to Leghorn, where were a knot of persons devoted to the study of Eastern philosophy, and eager to avail themselves of his knowledge.

Ananda was immersed in plans for the formation of occult societies in Europe. He had been given definite work to do, and it was his peculiarity, as well as a principle, of his philosophy, to immerse himself mind and soul to the business of to-day, without seriously troubling himself concerning the morrow. He was wont to say, "Throw all the energy of which you are capable into the act of hurling a stone in the right direction; but take no heed where it falls: so will your good deeds be untinged by personality."

If he had ever felt real uneasiness on the score of Lloyd's relations with Mrs. Vascher, he did not

now show it, but merely expressed his satisfaction that she was benefiting so much by the magnetic treatment, and again recommended Lloyd to abstain from testing her clairvoyant gifts. He intimated jestingly that he looked upon the intervention of the Brother of the Shadow as advantageous to Lloyd, for it had obliged him to curb his curiosity and practise self-discipline.

The Adept had not repeated his astral visit. In the re-actionary stage of his feelings, Dr. Lloyd was not disposed to accept Ananda's view of the Brother of the Shadow—if such he were. The experiences of the past week, chimed strangely with the warnings and admonitions of the magician. Dr. Lloyd had found that the gnawing want within him—the desire for feminine companionship and sympathy, could be assuaged by his friendship with Antonia. No matter that every day his thirsty heart demanded deeper draughts. Pretexts were not needed for the whiling away of an hour in the Vimiera Gardens, for bringing Antonia to the Château, somewhat before the time fixed for the magnetic treatment, for lingering among the olives on the way back to the hotel, or for making excursions to ruined and

almost deserted Monte Santo. No word of love had passed his lips, and, if in spirit he had been unfaithful to his trust, he had been true to it in the letter.

One day, after having taken her electric bath, Antonia came as usual into the library where he was waiting to magnetise her. She did not show her accustomed willingness, but begged him to defer the operation for a little while, and come out with her into the garden. He agreed, and they rambled about the old house, visited the shrine, and strolled on the terrace, where tea was brought them English fashion. Antonia's mood was fitful. She seemed struggling against inward depression, and her vivacity was forced and unnatural. Nevertheless, she chatted freely to Dr. Lloyd; and Bridget, who was walking behind them, by-and-by took an opportunity of remarking to him that she had not for months seen her mistress so well. "It's a miraculous change," added the woman, "I wish Colonel Vascher could see her at this moment."

Antonia heard her husband's name, and a faint look of bewilderment crossed her face, like that which it had worn when Ananda asked her

for news of him. "Bridget," she said, "Do you think Colonel Vascher would be pleased if he were here now?"

"Oh, ma'am," ejaculated the maid, "Why he wouldn't know what to make of you. How glad he would be. There's some colour in your cheeks now, and you're in such good spirits. I couldn't have believed that a dozen of those electric baths would have done all that for you, though, to be sure, the first day when I put my hand in and felt the queer creepish feeling, I thought they must have an effect one way or the other."

Antonia took two or three turns in silence. She paused at the foot of the stairway leading to the house.

"Dr. Lloyd," she said abruptly, "Let us go in, I want to talk to you. She mounted a few steps, and then halted to say, "Bridget, you may sit here and knit, and if you have anything to do in the hotel, go. I do not mind walking back by myself." He followed her, and opened the outer door for her to pass through.

As they entered, he said, "This will be the most convenient entrance for you at all times, Mrs. Vascher, and will save you a good many

steps round to the other side of the house, where my ordinary visitors come in."

He took a small key out of a drawer in the writing table, and handed it to her. "I gave this to Ananda," he added, "now that he is not here, I will make it over to you."

She fingered the key abstractedly. "When is Ananda coming back?" she asked.

"I don't know. The week he gave himself has stretched into two. But Ananda is a strange, uncertain creature, and he, as you know, is under the command of others."

"His Masters! Do you believe in them, Dr. Lloyd, and in their wonderful knowledge and powers?"

"I believe that they exist," he replied, "and that they know secrets of Nature which are hidden from us ordinary mortals. But you have lived in India, Mrs. Vascher, and must have heard tales of the Rishis or Mahatmas?"

"Yes; but all the Yogis I have seen looked very dirty and horrid. I could not believe much in their exalted knowledge. They say, though, that it is wonderful how news likely to affect India is known in the bazaars even before it can be telegraphed from Europe."

She sat down, looking absently around her.

"Dr. Lloyd," she said, "Do you want to be an occultist like Ananda?"

"I want to wrest from Nature some of her secrets," he answered grimly.

"Ananda's idea is that he must train himself to be absolutely pure and unselfish, and in time he will gain knowledge and be able to help the world. But you ought not to want more knowledge," she added, thoughtfully, "for you do a great deal of good already. See what you have done for me!"

"I *have* made you better!" he exclaimed, seating himself near her. "Bridget is right; the change is miraculous. It gives me happiness to look at your face, which is so much brighter than it was a fortnight ago."

"Is it bright now?" she asked, looking up at him, solemnly.

"No; you have grown suddenly sad. There is something the matter with you to-day. What is it? Tell me."

She was silent and grave.

"Will you not tell me?" he urged.

"I feel an inclination to tell you all kinds of

things," she began impulsively, and hesitated. "I don't know why I should not; and again, I don't know why I should. It's a feeling that I struggle against."

"Oh, why?" he exclaimed. "All that I care for in life is to serve you;" then afraid of startling her, he added more calmly, "you must often feel dull and lonely here. It would be a relief to you to confide in me."

"I have never once since I came here felt dull or lonely," she answered sweetly and solemnly. "At home my spirits are unequal. Julian was often disturbed at my fits of melancholy. I tried to conquer them, but it was of no use. Fond as I was of him, I could not even for his sake overcome my depression and irritability. Here everything is different. Why am I almost always in good spirits? It's unnatural."

She fixed her large violet eyes upon him. They filled him with trouble. He could not speak for a minute, at last he said, with a forced laugh, "It is a strange thing that you should distress yourself because you are now more lighthearted than you used to be. Isn't that a natural result of freedom from suffering?"

"Oh, no. You don't understand. Why was I dull and miserable in India? I had nothing to make me so. When I married I thought that there could not be a happier girl in the world than I. And Julian never disappointed me. I loved him more as time went on."

A spasm contracted Lloyd's heart; but he answered composedly. "The pain and the morphia you took were quite sufficient to account for the most horrible depression."

"It was before I got ill. I think the pain did me good, for it showed me how much I must love my husband to keep myself from crying out in my attacks. There was a shadow upon me before it came on."

"The shadow of your illness. Don't you know that nervous maladies frequently show themselves first in fits of moodiness and irritability?"

He rose from his chair and stood over her. She was leaning with her cheek upon her hand. He saw a tear fall upon her wrist.

"Oh, I cannot bear to see you unhappy," he cried. "It hurts me."

She let her hand drop. "Dr. Lloyd," she said in an agitated manner, "I will tell you what

made me sad to-day, when Bridget spoke of my husband. It is this. I have changed. I do not love him as I used. I never think of him. I have to force myself to remember him. On my voyage, every night my last thought was of him. Every morning when I awoke I said to myself, 'Another day nearer to the time when I shall see Julian again.' And now—he is gone out of my life. I am happy without him. I am a wicked woman; and yet I don't seem to realize it. It's only at moments like this, when something brings the feeling upon me suddenly, that he affects me at all; and then I am filled with remorse and terror."

A sob shook her voice. He felt a thrill of exultation. This was the moment for which he had unconsciously longed, for which he had not dared to hope—the moment in which she should become alive to the feeling that he—Lemuel Lloyd—was a reality in her life, and her husband but a shadow. Yet morally he was guiltless. Yes. He could acquit himself of base design. He had never willed that she should cease to love her husband. He had not misused his magnetic power. He had not voluntarily

attracted her towards himself. He held in abhorrence the grosser temptations which assail the mesmerist. All this he told himself with something like triumph, in the minute that followed her faltering confession. The impulse which had prompted it was not due to the mere electric *rapport* between them. The higher magnetism of Love had brought their beings into harmony.

With an immense effort he commanded himself. He still stood looking down upon her. She went on in a wandering pathetic way, not looking up to meet his fiery gaze.

"I sometimes think it may be the mesmerism —when I *can* think about it. For I notice that it is only just before I come here that I am troubled. I have a vague horrible feeling like waking up out of a dream; and it goes off after you have magnetised me. Then I am quite joyous again, and often the feeling does not come back the next day . . . . Dr. Lloyd," she looked up now, but lowered her eyes instantly beneath his. Her voice rang with passionate entreaty. "Do you think that it is the mesmerism which has changed me?"

"No," he answered in a low tone, "I do not

think so. It may have developed you. It has not changed you."

"I have heard, I have read," she continued with gathering agitation, "that anyone who yields passively to the influence can be made to believe and even to feel what the mesmerist wishes. I understood how necessary it was to choose one who would only wish me good. Dr. Lloyd, I don't know how to say it—it is a bad thought to come into my mind, but I must say it. Why should you wish to do me harm? Why should you want me to be different from what I used to be . . . . ? If you are not good—you! Julian's friend!—then no one is good"—she rose in her excitement and faced him, her lips trembling, her cheeks faintly flushed.

Her appeal wrung him to the heart's core. "I am not good," he said, brokenly. "I have feelings which are sometimes almost too strong for me. You have made me——" He paused—her wide eyes recalling him to himself. "No one is good," he went on hurriedly, "but to abuse such a power knowingly would be a baseness that——. I swear to you before Heaven," he added solemnly, "that I have never used my will to wean you

from your husband. My most earnest desire in magnetising you has been to do you physical good; and in that I have succeeded."

"Yes," she answered, her colour deepening. "Oh! forgive me, I am not ungrateful. The feeling came over me suddenly, and I was frightened. I am frightened still. I don't understand myself. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall be at peace and happy again."

He took her hand in his, and gently placed her on the divan, seating himself by her side.

"You are ill. You need tranquillizing. Let me magnetise you now."

"No, oh no!" she exclaimed, shrinking. "Not to-day."

"Are you afraid of me?" he asked in a voice of the utmost tenderness.

"No. I do not know . . . I am afraid of everything."

He still kept her hand in his. Her profile was towards him.

"Antonia!"

She started; and her hand moved in his as though she would have withdrawn it. But his fingers closing on it stilled the flutter.

"I can't call you by your formal name," he exclaimed. "It seems——." He hesitated again. "All conventionalities jar when we touch the deeper things of life—I do not vex you?"

"No," she rejoined in a mechanical way. "Call me Antonia."

"Do you not trust me, that you will not let me soothe and make you happy again?"

"To-morrow," she said; "not to-day—Oh, I beg of you—not to-day."

He released her hand.

"To-morrow then—or never, if you have any doubt of me or of yourself. You shall come to me of your own free will. Neither physically nor morally will I try to influence you, unless you yourself ask it."

He spoke with passionate intensity. He was making a bond with his honour. It was an heroic struggle. It was the last. He was guarding her against himself. At her command only would he surrender. She turned with a sudden gesture, as though his words had struck an unsuspected chord. Her eyes were piteous.

"I do not understand," she said, almost in a

whisper. "You know better than I. I could not bear you to forsake me; I am afraid. I am like a child playing with fire."

"Yes," he said, with sorrowful vehemence; "you are like a child; but you have nothing to fear. There is nothing in your nature which should make you shrink from the light. The fire cannot hurt you. The Light can only reveal in you living and pure forces—mysterious affinities which have lain dormant in your being, but which must obey the irresistible law of like to like. This is the secret of my magnetism. It has not changed you. It is only showing you your true and noble self."

"Oh, not true—not noble!" she cried, in accents of pain. "Give me back the love I felt for my husband. Make me one with him as I once was."

She had risen, and moved tremulously to the door. She stood there an image of beseeching. Her beauty and her grief so acted upon him that the temptation to exercise his power and draw her to his side was almost maddening. Oh that he might once more weave round her that fatal glamour, that he himself, intoxicated, deluded

by his imagination, believed due not to physical fascination, but to a higher, purer affinity.

He had extended his arms charged with the subtle magnetic fluid. Suddenly he let them fall. His face grew deadly pale, and by the strongest effort of will he abstained.

"Look," he said, "I obey you so faithfully that I can see you suffering, and yet refrain from giving you ease. But what you ask is beyond my power. If your love for your husband had been rooted deep in your nature, it would not have withered so soon. Something within me speaks and tells me that your love was no more than a girlish fancy. It is I who have touched your heart —I—unworthy that I am. You love *me*, Toni."

She uttered a little cry. In an instant he was beside her. She motioned him away. "Good-bye," she said; "I will never come here again."

He saw her vanish through the open door, and heard her step die away on the terrace.

He could not remain at the Château. Impossible to sit still in his study and give himself up a prey to his torturing emotions. The strain of keeping himself negative was greater than that

which the most determined concentration of energy could involve. He longed for some powerful magnetism which would lull his mind into inaction. Fiercely torn though he was, he still clung to the instinct of honour which forbade him to influence her by occult means. He knew well that by merely putting forth his will he could force her to return, and hear without anger the declaration of his love. But he shrank with horror from the thought of deliberately using his power to intoxicate her senses, and thus degrade both himself and her. He cherished the belief that Fate would waft them to a plane of existence where by right of higher evolution they might free themselves from conventional trammels. Love between them might be justified by an imperious necessity; but it was something more than the love to which vulgar arts could minister. Earthly it might be, but it was spiritual also. Fantastic visions of a dual existence—her soul dwelling unfettered with his in the astral world while in the flesh she was true to her material obligations—flitted through his brain, intensifying the tumult of feeling he was undergoing—duty to his friend; professional honour, keen in the

breast of a physician; love in its baser and nobler aspects; aspirations towards the occult life—all contended.

He had left the Château and had wandered away from Monte Santo far along the Cornice Road, till, from the heights of Turbia, he overlooked Monaco. It was moonlight. He walked on and on, descending by the zigzag route to Mentone. He spent what remained of the night at an hotel near the station. He kept himself awake lest in sleep he might be false to his bond. He *would* not think of hers. He chastised his too active fancy whenever it evoked the image of her—slumbering—the statuesque shape—the yellow roses—the unbound hair—the white neck smooth as a camellia petal . . . . . .

In the morning he took the train back to Nice. He made a *détour* in climbing the hill of Monte Santo, so that he should not pass the Hôtel Vimiera. He set himself a task—some abstruse geometrical problems taxing to the utmost his brain and attention. He goaded his thoughts. He would not suffer himself to pause—to hope—to wonder if she needed him—if she would write—or if, at the usual hour, she would come.

It was noonday. Through the closed venetians the warm air and breath of roses floated. The wind heaved in long sighs with a yearning, far-away sound. The insects murmured very softly. The bees were nestling in the orange-blossoms, and in the ilex grove a wood-pigeon cooed. There was a step upon the terrace: it ascended the stairs. He heard the timid knock—the fumbling of a little key. He rose and flung open the door before the key could turn. Toni was there. She entered, dazed, like one walking in sleep. The surprise, the joy overcame all his self-command. He took her hand: he kissed it wildly. "Oh, my Toni," he cried, forgetting everything. "You are mine — you are mine. Fate gives you to me. Before heaven, I have kept away from this place. I have forced myself to walk—to think of all the world but you—you, who are my very world—that you might be free. I would not sleep lest my spirit should seek yours in a dream. No stolen joy for me, Toni. It is mine by right."

She trembled violently. "I am in pain," she said. "I have come to you, because it is only you who can do me good."

He saw now that she was suffering. Her face was very white—almost as white as the dress of clinging cashmere which she wore. She had bound a broad crimson scarf round her waist. Why to-day? The thought flashed through his mind. But the physician was paramount even over the lover. She was in pain! He loosed the mantle which she seemed to have cast hurriedly about her, and removed her bonnet, she submitting child-like. "Come," he said, and, drawing aside the curtain, led her into the occult-room.

A sort of tremor seized her. She shrank back before she had advanced far.

"Not here," she exclaimed.

He was quite composed now. "You are in pain," he said. "I want to relieve you quickly; and the magnetism is strongest here."

"Oh, I am in great pain," she answered, and sank upon the couch beneath the magnet. "You will take it away," she said, with her pathetic smile; "but do not send me to sleep."

He stood over her and began his passes. The strange, soft light enveloped her with a mystic radiance as she lay in her white dress with her pale face against the blue cushions. Again her

limbs seemed to relax, and the strained, drawn look went from her features. "Tell me as soon as the pain leaves you," he said quietly; "then I will not magnetise you any more, but will sit beside you, and perhaps you will fall into a natural and peaceful sleep."

Presently she held up her hand. "The pain has gone now," she said. She smiled as she spoke. There was no care in her eyes. They were very sweet and languid. Her lovely lips had resumed their tender curves, and her cheeks were delicately tinted. His heart swelled with unselfish joy. He had brought her ease. For the moment, all was merged in impersonal solicitude for her. He drew forward a chair and seated himself at the head of the couch. A weird fancy struck him. Had the magnet been charged by a subtle electricity of which he also felt the influence? The same sense of exhilaration as that which he had experienced in the astral presence of the Brother of the Shadow thrilled his nerves. The warring forces within him subsided into delicious accord. No more struggles now. The fruit he had held his hand from gathering had fallen at his feet.

They were both silent for a little while. There

were no roses in the room that day. The omission pained him. He wished to cradle their love in soft perfumes. He left the couch and sprinkled some powder upon a silver chafing dish. In a moment thin wreaths of smoke filled the air with a delicate oriental odour.

He resumed his seat. Antonia looked up at him with a dreamy smile. "You are very good to me" she murmured, "I was ungrateful yesterday." Suddenly she gave a start, and opened her eyes wide, a vague alarm showing in them. "You are there!" she said "I thought I was being borne away; I felt frightened. It was nothing. I was beginning to dream. Don't let me go to sleep."

"Shall I read to you?" he asked. His voice sounded to himself far away and mechanical.

She assented. He took from the shelves a volume of French poems and read on, turning the pages rapidly—a verse here—a tiny love song there. While he read, she stirred, and leaned a little forward, one arm upraised upon the cushions supporting her head, and throwing into relief the contour of her bust. Her large eyes were upon him. Involuntarily, he too bent nearer, and his

hand stole to where her hand was lying among her hair, and closed on it.

He read at haphazard.

. . . . . .

C'est la brise du soir qui languit sur la grève
Défaillante et sans bruit comme un soupir d'amour,
Effleurant le sein brun de la vierge qui rêve,
Un baiser du pêcheur qu'elle attend chaque jour !
Sous les jaunes rochers la Méditerranée,
Se ride en bleus sillons, et le souffle léger
Pénétrant de fraicheur la nature fanée,
Fait tressaillir tout bas le myrte et l'oranger !
L'air est lourd de parfums, et la brise embaumée
Caresse les pieds nus de la fille qui dort,
Sur la grève assoupie et qui moitié pâmée,
Invoque en murmurant le saint patron du port.
Jeunesse ! Amour ! Beauté ! Pour vous la douce brise,
Et les illusions du temps des voluptés,
Mais pour les cheveux blancs, hélas ! la froide bise,
Les désenchantements et les réalités !

. . . . . .

He closed the book. She was still looking at him. His breath came quickly. That strange horrible magnetism was like serpentine coils enfolding them. She had raised her face. He slipped to the ground beside her, and kneeled so, his face close to hers.

"Toni—I love you!"

Their lips met, like two flames, and parted. "Toni—tell me that you love me."

She said very low, "When you are near me I am happy, I suffer no longer in body or in mind. Your touch is sweet to me. I live, I breathe for you. You are my master."

"No—your slave. I tremble before you. You are so beautiful in body and in mind. I reverence you. I scarcely dare touch your lips. Is this love baseness? This worship!"

He brushed with a kiss the waves of her hair. He pressed her hand to his burning lips. Yet, how strange it was! Though his caresses were unrebuked, though she smiled at him, and though her eyes swam with tenderness, the intense longing that he felt to hold her close to his heart, to drink all her sweetness in a long close embrace, was restrained by a feeling of awe—of sacrilege. It was as though a white-winged angel of purity hovered over her, and guarded her with an invisible sword.

Again he wildly clasped her hands.

"Toni, kiss me."

She bent towards him. Her fragrant lips were laid on his forehead. It was like the touch of one of her own cool fresh roses.

"Do not let us stay here," she said. "Let

us go out into the sunshine among the flowers."

He rose to his feet, staggering as though the fumes of the perfume had mounted to his brain. Something seemed to be stifling him. He wanted to draw deep breaths—to fling himself at her feet and exhale all the love strength in him in a passion of adoration.

"Come, Toni," he cried.

He stood gazing at her; yet still that subtile barrier intervened between them and held them both back, for she had half risen, and was before him pliant and unresisting as in that vision of the astral light.

"Come, Toni," he said again, but in a changed tone. "You are right. We will go into the flowers and the sunshine."

VI.

From that day Antonia's trouble seemed to vanish. She spoke no more of her husband. Her spirits were again buoyant. She was gentle and unembarrassed in Lloyd's presence. They might have been an affianced pair, so little suggestion of guilty love did her manner convey. She yielded sweetly to his caresses—rare—for always the passion turned as it were at swords' point, and his hot kisses melted as if in snow. Often she would touch with her lips his hands—his forehead, but her tendrest endearment was bestowed with the innocence of a child; and in the very gratification his love received, there was something phantasmal, so that the fever of his heart was never allayed.

He suffered. Every draught that he took of bliss intensified his thirst. When most happy, he was most wretched. Having once accepted the theory that they were fate-driven, he threw

aside doubts and qualms of conscience. His one care was so to surround her with an atmosphere of love and ease that no haunting thought of her husband should assail her. She had apparently forgotten that he existed ; and she seemed a creature of youth and sunlight for whom the future holds no sorrow. There was not a shadow in her eyes. She was all grace and loveliness. Her form had grown rounder. Her complexion was clear and healthful, her whole system vitalized. She took long walks with Lloyd. She spent hours with him at the Château or in the Vimiera Gardens. He magnetized her every day.

Already gossip circulated. The people at the hôtel had begun to comment upon the intimacy between doctor and patient. Yet even the most virulent scandal-monger acknowledged that it was difficult to associate lightness of conduct with a face so pure and candid. Indeed strangely enough, that very innocence of expression, not so noticeable at first, had become startlingly accentuated during the past few weeks.

This petty scandal did not reach Dr. Lloyd's ears, but Ananda heard it on his return, and till Antonia's manner reassured him, was deeply

troubled thereby. He had been absent nearly a month. During that time no news had arrived from Colonel Vascher. Antonia did not evince any anxiety at her husband's silence. Ananda was perplexed. He thought it probable that some communication had failed to reach its destination, and the suspicion was confirmed by a letter he received shortly after he had come back to Monte Santo, from another friend in India, which vaguely intimated that Colonel Vascher had left for Europe within a fortnight of his wife's departure.

Ananda watched Lloyd closely. The Doctor puzzled him. The familiar fashion of their intercourse had not been resumed. For the first time Ananda felt himself merely a visitor at the Château. It would have been difficult to say where the change lay; but change there undoubtedly was. Lloyd was colder and less confidential. His interest in occultism seemed to be now purely scientific, his more personal enthusiasm had waned. He evaded Ananda's inquiries concerning the Brother of the Shadow; and an instinctive delicacy forbade the Hindoo to question him too closely upon his treatment of Mrs.

Vascher. The manifest physical improvement she showed, ought to have been an ample answer. But the subtle alteration in her manner was to him a source of deep anxiety. He tried to hide it, however, for Lloyd did not encourage frank conversation. For the rest, they pursued their usual avocations during the day-time, and some literary work which Lloyd had suddenly taken up with great ardour, excused silent evenings.

They were on the terrace late one afternoon. Antonia was with them. She had been magnetised, and was on the point of returning to the hôtel, folding her woollen scarf round her in an abstracted way. But instead of moving, she sat down again, and her eyes turned towards Lloyd, who waited, leaning silent against a buttress of the old tower. The two pairs of eyes seemed to draw each other; and a third pair—Ananda's—wandered from the face of Antonia to that of Lemuel. The Hindoo was buried, as usual, in a great wicker-work chair, a cigarette in his mouth, and a book of Sanscrit philosophy before him.

Suddenly, a commissionaire appeared on the terrace. He had approached by the zigzag path

from the hôtel, and carried a piece of folded paper, which he handed to Antonia.

"Une dépêche pour Madame."

Antonia opened out the blue slip, and gazed in a dazed manner at the printed characters. She put it down in her lap, as though she had hardly comprehended the message, and then looked up piteously at Lloyd. She had grown white to the lips. Ananda was observing her keenly.

"Mrs. Vascher," he said, "I hope you have not had any bad news of your husband?"

Antonia turned towards him a strange blank look.

"It is from Julian," she said. "It comes from Naples. I don't know what it means."

"Ah!" replied Ananda quietly. "It is as I thought. He is on his way here."

Lloyd started violently. He advanced to Antonia and took the paper from her lap.

"What does it mean?" she asked in a bewildered tone.

Lloyd did not immediately answer. His teeth were tightly clenched together, and his face had become grey and stone-like, as though he had

been struck with sudden terror, or had heard some horrible news. It was with a perceptible effort that he mastered his voice, as he replied mechanically.

"Your husband must have telegraphed from India some time ago, and the telegram has not reached you. He seems to think that you are expecting him. This has been delayed in transmission. He wires from Naples that he has got off the steamer there, and will arrive here by train to-morrow evening."

"To-morrow?" repeated Antonia.

She gave no sign of surprise or joy. Indeed, she seemed but vaguely to understand his words. There was a curious silence. To Ananda the whole scene was a revelation. Dr. Lloyd was the first to speak.

"Mrs. Vasscher," he said, "this news has come upon you with a shock. You would like, perhaps, to go back to the hôtel. I will walk down with you."

She rose submissively. Without a word to Ananda, she moved along the terrace, Lloyd by her side. They disappeared presently among the olive trees. Ananda stood for a moment per-

fectly still, his dark eyes full of trouble and wonder. Then he slowly went up the steps and into the library.

Dr. Lloyd placed Antonia's hand within his arm. They walked down to the hôtel without uttering a word. He could not trust himself to speak. It was as though a heavy black pall had fallen round him, and he was closed in and stifled, a horrible doom impending. In silence still, they entered and ascended the staircase to Antonia's salon. The venetians were closed, and a fire of pine logs burned brightly on the hearth. The flames leaped up and reflected themselves fantastically in the mirror and the big Vaullauris bowls filled with spring flowers.

Antonia seated herself upon the couch and mechanically laid aside her wraps. He stood opposite, his eyes fastened upon her, his face like a white mask.

"Toni," he said at last in hollow accents, "tomorrow night, your husband will be here."

She half lifted her arms and let them fall again with a despairing gesture. He dropped upon his knees, and seized her hands, clasping them to his breast.

"Toni, do you know what it means?"

She shook her head; but her features were expressionless as though she had been stunned.

"It means that he will claim you as his own. It means that I, who love you better a million times than my life, better than my soul, must see you snatched from me in the very moment that I have gained you. It means that he will take you in his arms and be in Heaven, while I stand aside, and watch, enduring the tortures of hell. It means—And for you,—Oh, my Toni, you who belong to me—I cannot. It is horrible. It is devilish—It is more than I can bear."

His frame shook with a suppressed sob, "What can I do? What can I do? And you are so calm, so silent. You are stunned. Isn't it so, Toni? Rouse yourself. Think. Think of the agony of it—the shame of it."

She shuddered. He drew her close to him. "I am cruel to task you. My dove! Oh, my Toni. I am mad. Say once more that you love me."

"I love you," she repeated, very low.

"Are you brave?" he went on. "Will you face the world? You have given yourself to me

in word. Will you do so in deed? Will you go with me away from this place—now to-night—before Julian takes you from me. Will you trust your life to me?"

For the first time since their strange compact, she appeared to realize her true position. She was overcome with agitation. The tragic elements in her nature seemed roused, and the forces within her, no longer stupefied, were warring. A storm of emotion swept her features. She trembled like a leaf. Wresting her hands from his, and covering her face, she sank among the cushions of the sofa, her bosom heaving. Now, utterly beside himself, he pleaded madly, painting his passion—his despair.

Was it not he who had calmed her troubled heart, he who had given her back health, had torn away her girlish illusions, and shown her of what her grand womanhood was capable? It was he who had taught her the true meaning of love. In his presence she was happy, under his influence she drank in sunlight and sweetness, and enjoyed the fairness of earth and the beauty of life. She was his. They were united by a higher bond than the mere conventional tie of

marriage, to which her better nature had never consented. . . . They would fly to some free and lovely spot where they might live together in bliss and die in gladness, for time and eternity would be theirs. All this he poured forth. He told her that she was gifted beyond ordinary women. Together they would explore the Unseen World. No secrets would be withheld from them. They would emancipate themselves from the fetters of grovelling humanity.

She raised her head as he spoke thus, with all the wild eloquence of passion. A spasm of horror convulsed her features. Suddenly, she rose and stretched forth her arms, a strange light in her eyes, a strange smile on her lips.

"Julian," she murmured, in a far-away dreamy voice. "You are coming to-morrow. If you are stronger than this man who has become my master, break the spell that is upon me, and make me your own true wife once more. Come in God's power, if you are noble and pure, and set your Toni free."

Lloyd rose also, startled by her words, and stared round, almost expecting to see the absent husband whose aid she had invoked. But the

room was as it had been, only darker now, for the fire had died down. Phrensy seized him. His head felt light. He saw only her smile. Something seemed to burst within him, in the supreme effort of concentration that he made. He was conscious of nothing in the world but his intense longing. Honour, delicacy, all that held him back and forced him to grant her freedom of choice, were swept like straws before the torrent of his desire. His form seemed to expand. His eyes glowed like fire. He felt himself, as it were, borne up and inflated by an extraordinary sense of power.

Antonia moved slowly towards him, as if in obedience to an inaudible mandate. She appeared rigid: her eyes were glassy. She paused, and stood swaying slightly. Then, in an instant, the stiffness of her frame relaxed. An indescribably alluring expression stole over her face; and her eyes became soft and tender.

Suddenly a shriek of horror burst from her lips. She started back. "I cannot. I cannot," she cried, and fell fainting upon the couch.

He left her when she had recovered and lay

pale and exhausted, with Bridget watching over her.

There was still the morrow.

He could not return to the Château and meet Ananda's questioning looks. Baffled, torn by the fury of his passion, he walked through half the night like a restless wolf prowling the hills.

One o'clock had struck when he entered the Château. Moved by an impulse he did not try to combat, he went straight to the occult room and threw himself on the sofa beneath the magnet.

At two o'clock he awoke with the same feeling of excitement that he had experienced upon a previous occasion. It was no surprise to him to behold, standing at the foot of the couch, the form of his astral visitant Murghab, the Brother of the Shadow.

Murghab held the steel wand in his hand, and as before traced the shining pentagram, the single point turned northward. Round it he drew a serpentine figure that seemed to coil about the horns of the triangle.

"Friend Lemuel," said the smooth deep voice of the magician. "Have you not proved the truth of my philosophy? Have you not found that

Asceticism but forges chains for your soul, and that only by the power of fiery love—love pure and mighty, stronger than death, greater than life—can the perfected being soar upwards to light and knowledge?"

Lemuel gazed in fascination upon the inscrutable countenance of the magician, over which that ghost of a smile hovered.

"You have spoken wisely, Murghab," he answered, "there is one mightier force than magnetism; and that is love."

The Brother laughed gently. "Your occult training should surely have taught you that the spiritual magnetism which brought a universe into being, and the physical magnetism that draws a man to a woman, are higher and lower manifestations of the same FORCE: matter and spirit; the positive and the negative; attraction and repulsion; the two poles of electricity! What does it all come to?" And he murmured softly,

> "J'aime! voilà le mot que la nature entière
> Crie au vent qui l'emporte, à l'oiseau qui le suit!
> Sombre et dernier soupir que poussera la terre
> Quand elle tombera dans l'éternelle nuit!"

"You are convinced," he went on after a

moment's pause, "that the love you feel for Antonia Vascher is no mere physical affinity—no outbreak of the old sensual impulses you fancied had been crushed down? Had this been so, the power and the opportunity to gratify it have been yours."

"No," exclaimed Lloyd, with vehemence. "By this, I know that our love is holy. Her presence vanquishes all my longings; and when I look into her eyes, my passion seems reflected in their clearness, and I draw back guilty and ashamed—to worship."

"Yet," said Murghab, with cold distinctness, "you are maddened by the thought that at this time to-morrow night she will be in her husband's arms."

Lemuel started to his feet, the dew on his brow, his limbs writhing in anguish. "Why did I fail this evening?" he cried in a frenzied voice. "What was there in her which resisted my will? I felt in me the strength of a god—or a devil. At that moment, I could have drawn her very being into mine. She would have obeyed me—And now!"

He sank on the couch again, and covered his face with his hands.

"And now!" repeated Murghab. "It is not too late. The train by which Julian Vascher will arrive is not due at Nice till evening."

"Why did I fail?" cried Lloyd again. "Is it that she still loves her husband; and that the unconscious magnetism of his longing over-powered mine? If that be so, every moment that brings him nearer weakens my power."

"Let us talk this matter out," said Murghab, seating himself. So real did this Astral man appear, that Lloyd involuntarily put forth his hand to touch the slender olive fingers that rested on the leathern arm of the chair; but Murghab with a motion of his wand checked the gesture.

"You put the case clearly," he said, with his sardonic smile. "It is a strange study in occult dynamics. The husband is speeding through the night, each minute bringing him nearer to his wife, and tightening the invisible chains which bind them. The forces which their union has generated, are in full play, the more violent for months of quiescence. That is natural law. You, an occultist, know well that every emotion, every exercise of will-power causes a vibration in the

astral ether of which the effect is incalculable. The keenness of his desire for her, the influence of the physical bond which has united them, are acting against the more subtle and spiritual affinity that links her with you. Matter and spirit! To-morrow it will be seen which has most power to move her—the human—or shall we say—the divine?"

Lemuel burst into a discordant laugh.

"Your sophistries are very ingenious, but they do not impose upon me," he exclaimed. "I tell you, Murghab, that I love her, basely, humanly if you will, in one phase; divinely in another. I love her with my sense and with my soul. But the bodily impulse must exhale itself before the spiritual one can come into play. Is it so, or not?"

"It is so, Lemuel," rejoined the magician. "A sensual force may be utilized spiritually, if the energy be brought to culmination point, and then—turned. We will consider the situation: it is a curious one. Briefly, you love this woman, in, as you express it, both the higher and lower phases. She also loves you, but in the higher phase only. Her human nature is held in that physical,

emotional bondage called marriage, where, in the natural order of things, her progress arrests itself. Poor Toni! The soul within her pants and struggles—hence the vague unhappiness which she described to you. In both your natures there is a certain love-force which must be exhausted on the physical plane—or turned in another direction. You might then mount hand in hand a perfected pair—her psychic faculties supplying the need in you, your immense will giving her the element she lacks. Which is it to be? The struggle for the moment, the bursting of shackles; and then, on the one hand, the unimpeded development, the entire satisfaction of each dual nature, the grand occult life, the acquirement of power and knowledge. On the other hand—for you, retardation, the gnawing at your heart of desires forced back—having known *her*, could you ever descend to the material level?—fret, fever, imprisonment in the dungeon, forced asceticism is building for you: for her, an even worse death in life—the stultifying of her psychic capacities—the murder of her soul. Picture her, Lemuel: your Toni—the conventional English matron, the instrument to her husband's pleasure, the prop to his egotism,

ministering to his vulgar instincts, minding his house, nursing his children."

The magician laughed again. A groan escaped the tortured Lemuel.

"The picture does not please you?" said Murghab.

"Oh, cease," cried Lemuel. "You madden me with your sneers and sarcasms. Leave me, if you have nothing better to offer than gibes."

"I *have* something better to offer," replied Murghab, changing his tone. "My gibing is the ice-brook water which tempers steel. You need to be braced, hardened, elevated for the destiny in store for you. It is for that I am here."

"Why do you interest yourself in me?" exclaimed Lloyd impulsively.

"I have already told you," rejoined Murghab, "that my motive is not one of self-interest—that is, if a Being superior to circumstance can be said to have a motive. The laws of our order oblige us to keep guard over those in whom we see the potentialities of an Adept. You are so far in advance of your kind that, a little more, and you may claim it as your right to be an Initiate of the Secret Brotherhood. Dupotet, the Prince of

French mesmerists, said truly, that he who can wield the power of magnetism possesses the key to Nature's Mysteries. He himself possessed that power—you also. Every step of your career has been watched by the custodians of the Great Knowledge. Do you think that accident led you into the path of occultism? Do you think that accident brought Ananda hither? Do you think that accident threw Antonia Vascher in your way? No—all these influences have been slowly converging towards one point. Your masters have been preparing you for the ordeal which will test your worthiness to become one of their number."

Lloyd's eyes were dilated; his chest heaved.

"And this ordeal? he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Ye shall be as Gods knowing good and evil!" said Murghab in his bell-like tones. "This signifies that, for the Adept, there is no absolute good—no absolute evil. The conditions of his being transcend human law. At his height, of what value is the conventional scale of measurement? But, to attain this height—to transcend law—the will must in one sublime effort free itself for ever; and the aspirant, trained by unconscious trials of

strength, must in a final and stupendous struggle, slay the last one of the serpent Superstition's brood. Then, for him, there will be no so-called moral obligations, and he will have gained possession of the Tree of Life and its fruit for ever." There was silence. Dr. Lloyd seemed lost in thought.

"Explain to me the nature of the ordeal," he said abruptly. "You speak of slaying superstition—the superstition of right, of moral obligation, of the sacredness of marriage, if I understand you clearly. It is your wish that I should make Antonia my mistress, and you hold out as a bait that thus I shall obtain entrance into the Occult Brotherhood. That is a strange perversion of Ananda's teaching. It appears that your royal road to Adeptship lies not in purity, but in sensuality. I put the matter baldly, but I am anxious for information. And I tell you at once plainly that I am no candidate for the school of Black Magic."

Murghab, stooping, traced a cabalistic figure with the point of his wand. He took no notice of Lemuel's question.

"Well?" demanded the latter.

The magician raised his head. "What is moral obligation? he cried scornfully. "Does it not belong to the phenomenal plane of existence? Would the term have any meaning if the vast scheme of the universe could be viewed as a whole, and if the imperishable records of the Astral ether were visible to the multitude? Conceive of the stupendous revolution in human thought, could it at once be vividly realized that the Ego has always been and will always be, and that it is most nearly dead during its periods of imprisonment in flesh—for then all the higher faculties are in a state of torpor. Life is the short night filled with horrible dreams. Death the full and glorious day in which the finer senses are alert and active. The Adept, who sees beyond the grave, knows too well that affinity of souls is the only true marriage. He knows too well that to kill the body may be to free the spirit. Who think you would live if he *could* die? But the Adept is aware that to turn his hand against himself is no high road out of his difficulty. The pendulum must swing backward if the impetus be given, and by the law of rebound his next incarnation will be hastened. But

to be liberated without conscious volition! Happy Ego! For example, I who can read the Astral Book of the Past and the Future, need no assurance that were Julian Vascher to die to-morrow before he embraces his wife, he would be blessed beyond the power of mortal to imagine."

There was a long silence. At last Lemuel spoke in strange, anxious tones.

"You who have power to read in the Book of Astral Light, know that her fate and mine are written there. Disclose them."

"Were I to do so," replied Murghab, "there could be no ordeal—no test by which you would prove your right to the higher joys. Bear this in your mind. To know the Future implies emancipation. To know the 'may be' implies that the power of controlling destiny can be obtained. This, however, I may reveal to you. To-day a strange conjunction takes place of the planets which govern not only your fate and those of Antonia and her husband, but that also of Ananda. By the occult law of affinities, Antonia's destiny is blended with yours and with Ananda's. Do you suppose that this is the first time the three Egos

have been brought into connection? That would be to say that effects could take place without causes. Fail now in this opportunity which has been granted you both, to link Antonia's being indissolubly with yours, and either in this incarnation or in the next—my foresight does not accurately predict which—she will be united to Ananda, and you lose her—not for Time only, but for Eternity—See."

He raised his wand. Again the electric light grew dim before the Astral Radiance.

Twin spirits of air, yet gloriously human, divinely beautiful, Toni and Ananda, floated together. Their forms seemed to blend. Their faces met. Their lips were joined as one.

A cry of anguish, wrung in dire extremity, burst from Lemuel Lloyd. The celestial splendour had faded; the vision vanished; the blue walls mocked him in their blankness.

But Murghab was still before him: the pale olive face, so wonderful in its superhuman beauty, its intense sadness; the thin lips wreathed in a sinister smile; the lofty brow surmounted by that ominous red turban, so grand and mysterious.

"Murghab," cried Lemuel, "Brother of the

Shadow or of the Sunbeam, I know not, I care not which, I am ready to face the ordeal. Command, and I obey."

Murghab bent forward and pointed with his staff towards the writing-table. Lemuel's gaze followed the direction of the wand. He saw a thin vaporous cloud, which at first appeared like a faint smoky haze, form upon the table and gradually assume shape and density, till it resolved itself into a square sheet of curious Oriental paper covered with writing in small blue characters.

His eyes turned in amazement to the spot where Murghab had been. The chair was empty. The Brother of the Shadow had melted into air. Only his voice lingered.

"Study and prepare for the Ordeal."

VII.

THAT night Ananda the Hindoo sought counsel from his Master.

He fell into a deep sleep; and in the slumber of his body his spirit awakened, and he saw with his inner eyes the face and form of one whom he knew not in the flesh, but whom he reverenced above all others living or dead.

Ananda prayed.

"Master, thou art of the Light, and thy strength dwelleth only in truth and purity. Thou hast trodden down all earthly passions, and through love hast conquered love, yet art tender, and yearning to comfort the weak. Protect this woman against the Brother of Shadows and Darkness. Guard her against the evil will of him who has strayed into the Left Hand Path and would turn his powers to baseness. Save her in her innocence, and restore her to her husband. For him she has the soul-love which

alone makes marriage—I feel it—I know it. Let not that love be defiled and clouded by the glamour of the senses. Let it shine forth resplendent, mighty, triumphant—a radiance before which all that is foul shall flee away."

A smile of exceeding tenderness broke over the Master's god-like countenance, and his eyes, benignant yet sorrowful, rested upon the face of the suppliant, as he answered gently :

"Fear not, Ananda, nor trouble for the morrow. The affinity of souls must, in the end, assert itself, for duality is the law of being. Sooner or later, the grosser scales fall away, and the currents blend for ever. What matter if this take place in one life or in the next; on one plane of existence or on the other? If this woman be pure in heart, the Brother of the Shadow will work her no lasting ill. If there be evil in her, it will be purged. Out of sin may come good."

* * * * * * *

It was long before Lemuel Lloyd mastered the contents of the document which had formed itself so mysteriously before his eyes. Part of it was couched in cabalistic language, which, notwithstanding his researches into Magic, his intelli-

gence did not at once grasp. Other parts were clear and forcible, and upon these his imagination dwelt with avidity. Such passages held his attention in thrall.

* * * * * * *

For it is known to those who possess the Great Secret that by instrumentality of this Force, there may be evoked the Scin-Lecca or Astral Double of one not present in the body; and at the will of him who has learned to direct the Force, a hostile current may be projected against the Scin-Lecca which shall produce Death in its material counterpart. And this death shall be painless, swift, and its cause shall be undiscoverable. The man so struck will fall suddenly and die in syncope, and there shall be no trace. * * * * * * *

He who would evoke the Scin-Lecca, should be warned that he encounters deadly peril. This is the last, the stupendous ordeal in which the Larvæ most inimical to the human race are subjugated, and he who passes it successfully, is henceforth entitled to rank among the Initiates. Let the neophyte beware, if there be any shadow of fear in his mind, if his mastery of the Will Force be not absolute. A moment's tremor may cause his own destruction. * * * * * *

Let him understand that he calls into activity the most subtle and deadly potencies of Nature, for these potencies are allied to Humanity. He vitalizes by his will Elementals of the Borderland most dangerous to the rash intruder. These are the archetypes of human passions, and, like the genii of the Eastern fable, will rend their master if once suffered to escape from his control. To the resolute there is no danger, but death or madness may be the penalty paid by the imprudent or untried invoker. * * * * * * * *The rite of Evocation should be thus conducted.*

Then followed minute details of certain mystic ceremonials, and instructions for self-preparation and strengthening of the will, also for the establishment of necessary *rapport* between the operator and the victim by means of a third person in affinity with both.

The instructions now became more personal and explicit. It was indicated that Antonia Vascher furnished the requisite link between Lemuel and her husband. The mesmerist was directed to turn an odic current upon her, which should at a given hour bring her to him. All would then be complete, and the conditions which

exact for any magical rite the presence of three persons, fulfilled. The hour fixed was six in the evening.

Morning found Lemuel Lloyd still poring over the document. All day he remained in the occult room. At sundown everything was in readiness.

He felt no thrill of fear, no doubt of success. His nerves were strung to their highest pitch. He was almost numbed by the intensity of his exaltation. Wavering was now out of the question. The concentration of his energy amounted almost to physical pain. So violent was the tension that he even found himself contemplating the possibility of the strings snapping. A little more, and he knew well the boundary line of sanity would be passed.

All day, in a sub-conscious way he heard the roar of the Roman express. He knew intuitively when it drew near the time of its arrival. He knew also intuitively that Ananda had gone to the station to meet Colonel Vascher.

All was clear to him. He could ponder upon the scheme with diabolical calm. Julian Vascher would never reach Monte Santo. At the appointed moment the occult forces would converge

in one supreme and deadly dart: and the doom would fall.

The chamber was prepared. The mystic pentagram had been traced. The magic-lamps were lighted. Strange and horrible substances burned in a brass brazier placed within the cabalistic circle. Blood had been spilled. Murghab stood in his white robes and crimson insignia, erect, demoniacal and magnificent.

At his bidding Lemuel began the incantation. His voice, low at first, grew louder by degrees. Smoke rose from the brazier. The fumes of the blood spread. A thin cloud filled the room. Then Lemuel became aware of the most subtile and exquisite perfume, like nothing he had ever before known, which suffused the atmosphere and sharpened his senses, producing in him a feeling of wild elation and buoyancy, so that he lost the idea of weight, and appeared to himself to be borne upon wings.

But this sensation subsided and was replaced by one of resistless ascendancy and might. Space itself seeming subject to him.

Thrice he repeated the invocation. And now, the cloud had become at once more dense and more transparent. Of such ethereal particles was

it composed that it might have been likened to rarefied glass, glowing with the prismatic colours, and yet, though absolutely imponderable, shaping itself in innumerable snake-like convolutions that by turns contracted and expanded, each time gaining, as it were, fresh vigour and size. To Lemuel's bewildered vision the mist appeared to have strange chameleon-like properties—for it was now grey, bloodless, and hazy—now a gigantic and glittering snake, and now faintly human, at one instant showing the exquisite outlines of a nude female figure, and again, ere the eyes could seize a tantalizing glimpse of delicious flesh tints, and the glory of snow-white bosom, the strange larva had distended once more its serpentine coils, which, as they folded back upon themselves and upon him, took each time greater consistency.

"This," murmured Murghab, "is the mightiest of the Elementals. It is the typified Love."

In a brief flash from among the coils, now shining as if with jewels, Lemuel beheld the face of a woman, maddeningly beautiful—of the sensuous model—full lips, low arched brows, deep shaded eyes, hair of gleaming gold. Was she the type of a Helen, a Phryne, a Parisian

cocotte? As with a blood-curdling thrill, he realized the horrible fascination of the creature: lo! it was again a bloodless aërial phantom, a winding formless cloud.

The sound, or the intuitive perception of a footstep, a presence approaching, struck upon Lemuel's keenly sensitive nerves. The blood forsook his heart. He was transfixed; but with ecstasy. He stood dauntless. She was here—she had paused in the adjoining room—the woman he loved.

"Antonia has come," said Murghab, with his cold smile. "The crisis of your destiny draws near. You have need of courage. All depends upon the fiery energy of your will. See! The Scin-Lecca rises. From your hate the Elementals drink in strength to destroy their prey."

Murghab pointed with his wand, and in the distance, for the room now seemed all cloud and serpentine eddies, so that material objects and actual dimensions were lost, Lemuel beheld a faint simulacrum, the reflection, as it were, of Julian Vascher's face and form; but so dim, that though eyes and features were defined, and the living expression of mingled hope and anxiety was recognizable, the apparition resembled a

shadow thrown upon some pale wall by lamplight rather than the astral double of the breathing man for which he had been prepared.

Gradually the image seemed to become more real and human, and a soft silvery *aura*, which radiated from it, intensified into an almost dazzling lustre. This *aura* surrounded the Scin-Lecca like a translucent veil; and in comparison with its brightness the vaporous mass which appeared to embody the Elemental Force, was turgid and miasma-like. Lemuel observed also that it seemed elastic and to have the power of repelling the insidious advances of the serpentine Thing,—the typified Lust—not Love — which would circle round, and recoil, and then, as it were, sucking strength from his malevolent will, would propel itself with renewed animosity.

Suddenly innumerable jets of flame sparkled and flickered all through the vapour, orange, ruby-coloured, and azure, now elongated, now round, now assuming grotesque and horrible shapes, now a brood of young salamanders, with the limbs and faces of children caressing the formless Thing, which was at the same time woman, snake, cloud, all three, and yet never one of the three. The Child Elementals appeared to have

alike Protean capabilities ; for, in one instant they were heavenly cherubs, in another, tongues of fire, in another, fiends whose faces, notwithstanding their beauty, were strange masks from which glowed eyes luminous with hate and venom.

Forwards, backwards, and round they circulated, always returning to Murghab and to Lemuel as to a base, and seeming to derive life and strength from the breath of the latter and from the horrible mesmeric fluid that streamed through his extended fingers, meeting again and converging once more to the point where floated the image of Julian Vascher, protected by its glorious *aura*.

A woman glided through the veiled doorway into the occult chamber, and approached Lemuel. It was Antonia. She moved automatically like one walking in sleep. Her eyes stared, and yet were unseeing, her features rigid. It was evident that she had been brought hither by the mesmerist's spell unconscious of her own fate, and of that impending over her husband, unconscious of the pestilent magnetism, the superhuman forces, the ghastly larvæ, which by foul arts had been invoked for the destruction of the man she loved.

Was she unconscious? If the outer eyes were blind, might it not be within the range of possibility that slumbering clairvoyant vision would awake, and would comprehend the horror of the position? Was there no safeguard for her but her own instinctive purity?—No shield for the victim's life, but that shining veil—the love, of which her own beclouded senses did not realize the intensity?

Lemuel took her hand in his. This was the fateful moment. The world stood still. His whole being was merged in the passion of murderous desire. The drops stood on his brow. His frenzy numbed him. Murghab spoke.

"Concentrate your vital energies, and direct the fluid, while you mentally conjure the larvæ in the form of evocation. Beware of faltering. The great impetus once given, and the astral potencies set in motion they will accomplish their aim, but if arrested, the force will rebound upon yourself."

Like the mother, who, while she strangles her infant, lays her hand upon its mouth, that she may not hear its last cry, Lemuel turned, so that when his will launched the destroying bolt, his eyes might not be forced to meet those of his betrayed friend.

A voice sounded. It seemed to come from a distance. It was Julian's voice. Was it the Astral double which spoke?

"Toni."

As though she had been a dead woman recalled to life Antonia started, and a long shriek of horror and bewilderment echoed through the room. She moved a few steps. The mesmeric spell was broken, the rigidity was gone, and the sightless look had left her eyes. Clear and undaunted they gazed around; and her mind, quickened by intuition, took in every detail of the ghastly scene. She saw the burning brazier, the mystic lamps, the pentagram of ominous import. She felt the bloody fumes. She saw Murghab the Magician standing cold, disdainful, and satanic. She saw the half materialized elemental forces—and she saw others hovering in the Astral Light seraphic and radiant. She saw the image of her husband, and, as in a lightning flash, she realized the truth.

Her eyes sought those of Lemuel with wild appeal, piercing reproach. He uttered a faint cry, and with a passionate imperious gesture motioned her to his side. She recoiled from him with loathing and horror.

Then her gaze turned like that of an indignant angel upon Murghab, Brother of the Shadow. Victim and destroyer confronted and defied each other. Antonia's form dilated. She neither quavered nor shrank. She was no longer helpless. Though she saw him not, a God-like Being stood close behind her, and above hovered the pure spirits who attend the innocent. Ananda's prayer had been answered. The magnetism of his Master, the White Adept, shielded the weak woman against the powers of Evil.

"I know you," she said to Murghab. "It is you who stood in the shadow by the sea shore, where the sand and the waves were blood. It is you who would have taught me horrible secrets—you who made me mad, and turned my love from my husband. But he is here, he is here, God has sent him to save me, and to make me his own again . . . . . Julian" she cried, stretching forth her arms to the Scin-Lecca which seemed to smile, "I have been mad. I have been dreaming. Now I am awake. Now, I see and I know. I love you. I love you, and you only! Oh soul of my soul! Husband!"

Her agonized tones pierced the mephitic air of

the chamber, and seemed to disperse the deadly vapours.

A human voice replied, "Toni, I am here."

In another moment the door crashed open, and Julian Vascher in bodily presentment entered the room, followed by Ananda. They, sense-bound, saw not that which could be visible only to the eye of the clairvoyant. For them, the Brother of the Shadow, the Elemental Forces, the Scin-Lecca, even the form of the White Adept, had no existence, but Ananda knew that the crisis had come, that the peril was past, he felt intuitively the presence of his Master. Julian Vascher stopped for a second, just a second, on the threshold and looked round like one suddenly roused from sleep by a cry for help, like one uncertain, straining his eyes to see their way through vapour, mist, and darkness, rushing to the rescue of some one he loves—rescue from danger, the nature of which as yet he hardly understands.

Yet another moment, and Antonia was in his arms, and he was crying, "My Toni, I have come to you."

And she clung to him; and he, defiantly facing Lemuel, the false friend, held his wife, as it were, prepared to defend her against all powers in earth

or air, in heaven, or the central darkness of hell, that should attempt to keep her from him.

And now a strange change came over Lemuel. There was no violent throe, no throbbing convulsion. He stood very still; his extended arms dropped nerveless. It was over. The struggle was ended. The ordeal was past. A clammy coldness and sensation of faintness overpowered him. He gazed silently at the woman he loved, at the man he had sought to betray and destroy. He knew that the deadly current had rebounded upon himself, and that for him there was no more of life. A mist closed in around him, and swallowed up Murghab and the Larvæ he had evoked. Antonia's eyes shone still for him like veiled stars. Then they vanished too, and he was alone with Death.

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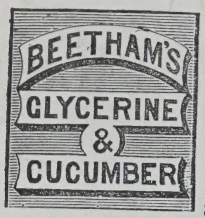

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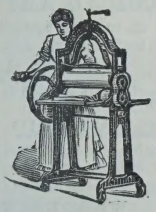

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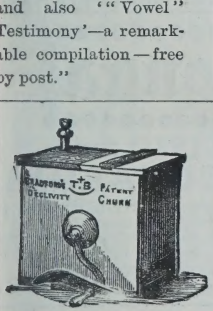

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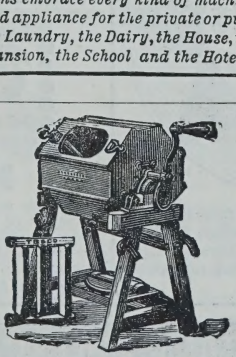

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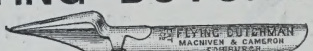

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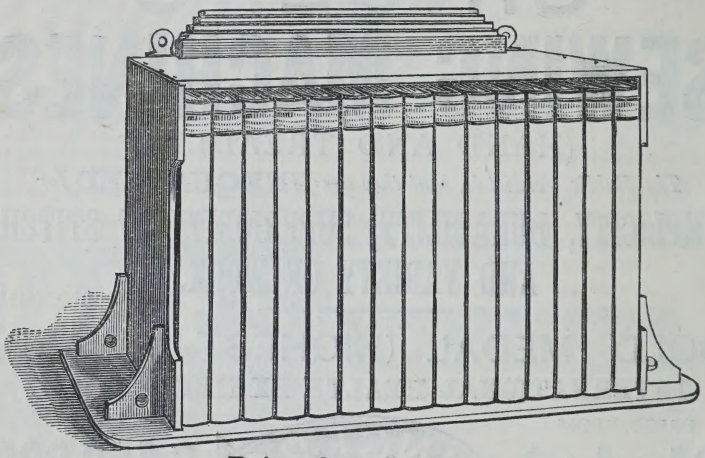

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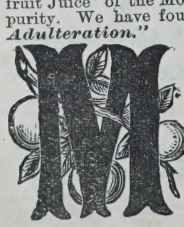

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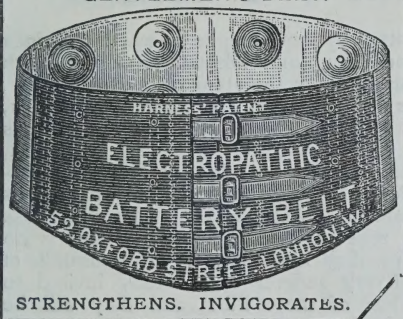

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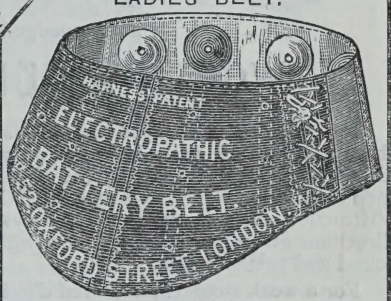

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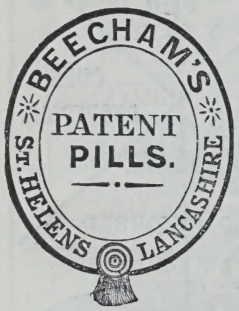

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